

BLIND BROTHERS

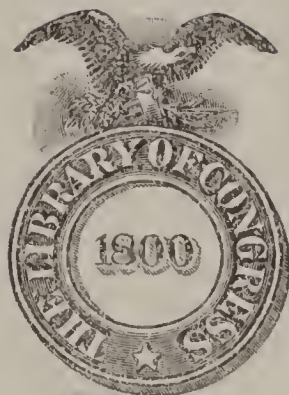
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By

TATE W. PEEK



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I

Gil Hammond knocked rather decisively on the door marked "Dean of Engineering," and was admitted by a small, sharp-eyed professor.

"Come in, Mr. Hammond," invited the little man. He motioned to a chair. There were about a dozen other men seated in the office, all of them members of the university faculty. The Dean of Engineering sat behind his desk. Gil glanced about the room at the various professors, all of whom were well known to him, some of them his personal friends. They were all regarding him curiously. Their critical glances made him feel uncomfortable.

The Dean spoke:

"You are aware of the reason for this meeting, I take it, Mr. Hammond?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir; I suppose it is to investigate the loss of the funds from the *Pelican* safe," Gil replied.

"You are correct," returned the Dean. Addressing the group, he continued:

"Gentlemen, I have called you together to deal with a very unpleasant situation. Mr. Hammond, as you all know, is student-manager of the *Pelican*. He reports to me that there is a deficit of two hundred dollars in the proceeds of the California-Washington game, which funds Mr. Caldwell, who is manager of the

baseball team, gave to Mr. Hammond to place in the safe in the *Pelican* office, until the funds could be deposited in the First National Bank the following Monday, which is today. As you gentlemen know, the banks were all closed on Saturday afternoon.

“As Mr. Caldwell was leaving yesterday with the team, on its northern trip, he asked Mr. Hammond to deposit the funds for him. Mr. Hammond states that when he came to re-check the cash at the bank this morning he found it to be two hundred dollars short of the amount called for on the memorandum given him by Mr. Caldwell. He also states that when he checked the funds, upon receiving them from Mr. Caldwell, that his count tallied with the memorandum. As the original count was made in the gymnasium, in the office of Dr. Harper, and in the presence of several witnesses, there can be no grounds to suppose that he made a miscount. And as Mr. Hammond further states that he did not open the box containing the funds, from the time he received them until he reached the bank this morning, the possibility of their being mislaid is also eliminated.

“We are forced to arrive at the conclusion that someone has entered the *Pelican* office and taken the funds.”

The Dean turned to Hammond.

“Has any person, other than yourself, had access to the *Pelican* safe since Saturday afternoon, Mr. Hammond?”

“To the best of my knowledge no one has had access to the safe since Saturday afternoon,” replied Hammond. “No one else knows the combination except my roommate, Lester Powell, who was in San Francisco over the

week-end. Lester is editor of the *Pelican*, as you gentlemen know."

"You say that you placed the money in the safe yourself, Mr. Hammond?" asked the Dean.

"Yes. The money was in packages of bills—tens and twenties—and in silver. All these were in a tin box. I placed the box inside the safe and locked it myself, Saturday afternoon, about five-thirty."

"Was anyone with you at the time?"

"No, sir; Lester Powell saw me receive the money from Pat Caldwell, but he did not go with me to the office. We were with some ladies. Powell and the others waited for me on the campus."

"Did you go to the office at any time after leaving the money?"

"No, sir. I spent the week-end in San Francisco at the home of Lester Powell. I returned to Berkeley Sunday night."

"Did Mr. Powell also return Sunday night?"

"No. He returned this morning, after I had already opened the safe. Of course, any suggestion that he had anything to do with the affair is ridiculous, sir."

"H—m," grunted the Dean, glancing meaningfully at the little professor who had opened the door. "No one has suggested Mr. Powell as a possible culprit, I believe. By the way, Mr. Hammond," he continued, "have you any proof of the fact that you went directly to your room Sunday night, after your return from San Francisco?"

Hammond looked nonplussed for a moment.

"N—o, sir"; he hesitated. "I went directly to my fraternity house. All of the fellows were out at the time, or at least I didn't see any of

them. I worked for an hour or so and then went to bed. It must have been ten-thirty when I arrived. I don't know just when I went to bed, sir."

"H—m. I see. You did not mention the fact that you had left the money in the safe, to anyone, I suppose?"

"No. I didn't give the incident much thought, sir. Of course I had no idea that any difficulty would arise. I considered depositing the funds in the University vault, but the business office, as you recall, was closed on Saturday afternoon. There was no one to open the vault."

The Dean once more addressed the assembled professors.

"The two stories seem to coincide in regard to Mr. Powell," he said. Turning to Hammond, he continued:

"Have you any theory as to the possible solution of the theft, Mr. Hammond?"

"None whatever, sir. The safe had evidently been opened by someone who knew, or who did not need to know, the combination. It is a substantial safe, but not very modern. An experienced safe-breaker wouldn't have had a lot of trouble opening it, I imagine. The safe was locked, just as I left it Saturday night, when I re-opened it this morning, sir."

"Then you think that a common burglar must have been the guilty person, Mr. Hammond? Do I understand that you wish to advance that theory?"

Hammond hesitated.

"I had no intention of advancing any theory, sir. It seems to be the only possible explanation, as Powell and I, who were the only per-

sons who knew the combination to the safe, were in San Francisco at the time of the removal of the money."

"How do you account for the fact that only two hundred dollars were taken by the thief?"

"I don't account for it. It looks as though someone had needed that amount very badly, and did not care to take more. It's a mystery to me, sir."

"H—m. I see. Mr. Hammond, I shall have to ask you to step into the outer office for a few minutes, while the committee considers your statements."

Hammond arose and passed into the outer office. He was surprised to see his roommate, Lester Powell, seated by the table. As Powell had not returned from San Francisco until that morning, Hammond had not seen him since the day before.

"How are you, Old Man?" Powell asked. "Have they been razzing you? I met Doc Hadley, the damned old question mark, on the campus this morning, and he dragged me in for an hour's seance. It was hell. Thought the old shyster was trying to hang it on to me. But I didn't give him much satisfaction if he was. What did they ask you?"

"Not very much; just the details. I don't see how they can connect either of us with it. We were both in the city over the week-end. The only thing that worries me is that none of the fellows were at the house when I returned last night."

"You mean that you can't prove where you were after you left 'Frisco?"

"No; I came straight to the house, but none

of the fellows were in. That might happen any time though. I don't think that they have any grounds for suspecting me. My record has been pretty clean, you know. Dr. Hadley trusts me and I'm pretty sure that he doesn't believe that I have been mixed up in it. Of course, he has to do what he can to get to the bottom of the affair. I don't blame him for that."

"But it isn't Doc Hadley that you have to convince; it's that damned, gimlet-eyed, psychology fossil of a Martin. Did he question you?"

"No; only Dr. Hadley. I don't think that there is any reason for us to worry, Les. Of course I'm all cut up about it, but since neither of us could possibly have had anything to do with it, I can't see any use in worrying."

"I'm worrying. You don't know Martin. He's a devil. Thinks that he can work his psychology stuff, and read your face. He's a sneaking—"

The door opened and the Dean beckoned them to re-enter. Hammond took his former seat. Powell was given a chair beside him. Dr. Martin, the little psychology professor, moved his chair in front of them and addressed Powell in low even tones.

"Mr. Powell, you and Mr. Hammond are fraternity brothers, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Hammond is an intimate friend of your family, is he not, Mr. Powell?"

"Yes, sir; Gil and I have known each other since we were kids."

Dr. Martin smiled. "Thank you," he said, turning to Hammond.

"Mr. Hammond," he began, speaking very courteously, "you will pardon a few personal questions, I hope?"

"Go ahead, Doctor," Gil replied.

"You are assisting in the Geology Department, are you not?"

"Yes, sir; I earn part of my expenses that way."

"Then I take it that you are not burdened by an excess of financial advantages?"

Hammond grinned. "I have never lost any sleep worrying over any such excess, Doctor," he replied.

"We have all been similarly fortunate in that respect," continued the doctor, bowing slightly to his colleagues. The others exchanged amused glances. Hammond was beginning to feel more at ease. Powell sat fingering the gold football on his watch chain, his eyes fixed on the pattern of the carpet.

Suddenly Dr. Martin leaned forward. He spoke in cold crisp tones; each word sounded like the dropping of beads from a broken necklace on a polished hardwood floor.

"Mr. Hammond, will you kindly explain to the committee where you secured the two hundred dollars which you bet and lost to Mr. Harrison Christy, on the California-Washington baseball game, played last Saturday?"

Hammond was amazed. All eyes in the room, except those of Powell, were searching his face. He flushed and then became pale.

"The money was my own personal property, sir," he said at last.

"Did you give Mr. Christy a check?" shot the doctor.

"No. I paid him in cash."

"When did you pay him?"

"Saturday evening, sir."

"Where?"

"At the Olympic Club. We were there with some of the Washington fellows."

"Who saw you pay him?"

"Why—Lester here, and several of the gentlemen who were at the club at the time."

"Where did you get the money you used to pay him?"

"I—I had it in my room."

"What were you doing with such a sum of money in your room, Mr. Hammond?"

"I—I won the money last Wednesday, on the Oregon-California game."

"With whom did you bet?"

"I don't know the man's name, sir. The bet occurred in the grand-stand. The man was standing next to me."

"I see."

Martin turned to Powell. "Mr. Powell, did Mr. Hammond go to his room before leaving for San Francisco?"

Powell hesitated; he was visibly excited.

"I—don't know, sir," he replied.

Gil looked at his roommate in amazement. Powell had been in the car when Hammond entered the fraternity house. Les had asked Gil to bring him his cigarette case from the bureau, in their room. Powell now gazed at the carpet. His hands were twitching nervously.

"Mr. Hammond," continued Martin, "are you in the habit of betting large sums on athletic contests?"

"N—o, sir. I never bet any, to amount to

anything, before the Oregon game. When I won I thought that I might as well risk the money on California Saturday."

"Did you bet on California Wednesday?"

"Naturally!"

"Mr. Hammond, do you realize that betting is a practice not encouraged by the faculty of this institution?"

"I know that gambling in any form is not recognized by the University, sir. But I am over twenty-one years of age. The money was mine. I don't think that there is any disgrace in betting. It is done quite often."

"That is a matter of opinion, Mr. Hammond. But, in view of the evidence presented, do you expect us to believe this statement of yours about the removal of the funds from the *Pelican* office?"

Hammond arose. His face was pale.

"Dr. Hadley, and gentlemen," he said, "I do not wish you to believe anything except the truth. The statement which I have made is absolutely correct in every detail, to the best of my knowledge. I did not take the funds; I do not know, nor have I the least idea who did. My record here at the University has been good. Let that speak for me.

"It is obvious, from Dr. Martin's question, and from the evidence presented, that I am under suspicion. Gentlemen, I swear by everything that I hold sacred, by my honor as a man, and by the sacred ties of my fraternity, that I did not commit this theft. There isn't anything more for me to say."

Gil turned to the geology professor, a fatherly old man, who had always befriended him in

every possible way. The old man's face was troubled. He seemed bewildered.

"Dr. England, speak for me. You have known me for more than three years. For two years I have worked in your laboratory. I have had charge of laboratory expense money and have collected fees. Have you ever found me dishonest? Have you ever found one cent missing from the funds, or one unaccounted-for mistake in the records?"

Dr. England arose.

"What Mr. Hammond says is true, and I take pleasure in confirming it," he said. "During the last three years I have known Mr. Hammond and have had many chances of observing him. Gentlemen, I do not believe this charge. I would be willing to stake my reputation that the boy is not guilty."

Dr. Martin regarded him coldly.

"Have you any evidence, other than personal opinion, to present, Doctor?" he asked.

The old man looked at him contemptuously.

"I am not accustomed to deal with the methods of a police court," he retorted, "nor do I dabble in criminal psychology. I merely gave my opinion as that of an old man who has spent the greater part of his life teaching and dealing with young men and women."

Hammond had remained standing while the old doctor was speaking. "Thank you, Dr. England," he said.

The Dean spoke.

"Of course, Mr. Hammond, you realize that in any court of justice a man is considered innocent until he has been proved guilty. You understand also that we are all very anxious

that any suspicion be removed from your name. But, of course, you must also realize that we sit here, not merely as your friends, but as a committee of investigation. Our business is not to form opinions, but to secure and weigh evidence.

"The question of betting, itself a serious charge, is dwarfed by the more important one of the missing funds. You must realize that you are open to suspicion on the latter charge all the more because of the former one, which you yourself have admitted.

"You will remove all suspicion against yourself on the latter charge by proving first, that you placed the money in the safe; second, that you did not return to the *Pelican* office at any time after you had left the University grounds Saturday afternoon; and third, that you secured the funds for your bet as you stated.

"We have already verified your visit to San Francisco. The matter then simmers down to proof of your having personal funds for the bet, of your placing the baseball funds in the safe, and of your statement that you went directly to your fraternity house upon your return to Berkeley.

"You will be given ample time to furnish these proofs before any definite action is taken in the matter."

The Dean turned to Dr. Martin.

"Do you wish to question Mr. Hammond further?" he asked.

"No. Mr. Hammond may be excused, if he so desires," replied the psychology professor. "Mr. Powell, will you be so good as to remain for a few minutes?" he asked.

Hammond left the room in a daze.

When Hammond had gone Dr. Martin turned to Powell.

"Mr. Powell, will you please tell the committee what you know of the case, just as you told Dr. Hadley and me this morning?" he asked.

Powell fidgeted in his chair, twisted at his necktie and hesitated. Dr. Martin continued:

"Of course, we all know how unpleasant this is for you, Mr. Powell, considering your intimate relations with Mr. Hammond, but the interests of the University demand that this affair be sifted to the bottom and made clear.

"Do you know anything about Mr. Hammond's betting on the Oregon-California game, last week?"

"N—o; that is—I heard Gil say that he expected to make a clean-up on the game, if his luck held. I didn't pay much attention. Most of the fellows bet something on the games, now and then, sir. I didn't think that Gil had bet much. I really thought nothing of it, at the time."

"Did Mr. Hammond have any money in the bank, or elsewhere, to your knowledge?" asked Dr. Martin.

"No, sir. He was usually pretty shy of cash. He borrowed ten dollars from me before the game."

"Was that anything unusual around your fraternity house?" interrupted Dr. England. "I understand you fellows are always borrowing and lending to each other."

"It wasn't anything unusual, of course. Usually the fellow that has money divides with

the others. I have lent Gil money dozens of times before, and thought nothing of it."

"Did he always pay it back?" asked Dr. Martin.

"Yes, so far as I know. As I said, we are always borrowing and lending. Nobody keeps a very strict account, sir."

"Why did you mention his borrowing ten dollars from you, Mr. Powell?" questioned Dr. England.

"I—I was rather surprised, especially as I saw him pay Mr. Christy two hundred dollars, later in the afternoon, sir."

"Did he pay Mr. Christy cash, or a check?"

"Cash. Gil had a roll of bills."

"Did he give Mr. Christy the entire roll?"

"No, sir. There was some left. I noticed, because he paid me back the ten I had lent him when he paid Christy."

The old man looked worried.

"Did Hammond borrow the money before he received the baseball funds from Caldwell?" asked Dr. Martin.

"Yes, sir. We were with a bunch of co-eds, and Gil whispered to me that he was broke."

"Did you see him enter the *Pelican* office after the game?"

"No. I paid no attention. I was busy introducing the girls to some of the Washington fellows, and did not notice Gil until he joined us later on the campus."

"Did he have time to leave the money while he was gone, do you think?"

"I really couldn't say, sir. I kept no track of the time. I should think that he would have had."

“Did you and Mr. Hammond go to your fraternity house, before leaving for San Francisco?”

“Yes, sir. We had left our traveling bags in the hall. Hammond jumped out and got them. I remained in the car.”

“Your room is on the upper floor, I believe. Did he have time to go upstairs for the money, do you think?”

“I—I couldn’t say, sir. It seems to me that he returned almost immediately. The bags were in the hall.”

“Do you think that he had the money which he paid Mr. Christy, in his traveling bag?”

“He couldn’t have had, unless he took it out in the hall. The baggage was in the other car when we stopped at the Olympic Club to drop two of the Washington fellows. We were at the club only a few minutes.”

“There were several in the party, I believe. Why did Hammond return to Berkeley before the others?”

“I don’t know. He seemed restless—said that he wanted to get back Sunday night. Had some business to attend to—something in connection with the *Pelican*, I believe.”

“Did he tell you that it was something connected with the *Pelican*?”

“Yes, sir.”

Dr. Martin looked significantly at the others.

“Then he must have gone to the *Pelican* office after all,” he said. “That accounts for the rest of the funds not being taken. He had the opportunity to replace them.”

“Couldn’t he just as well have replaced them Monday morning?” asked Dr. England. “That

proves nothing, that I can see. There is nothing definite about it."

"It is a well-known psychological fact," answered Dr. Martin, "that when a person has something weighing on his mind, something to be done, the person does not rest until the thing is done. Besides, Mr. Hammond did not know that Mr. Powell would not be present when he opened the safe, or would not have an opportunity to open it himself, were Hammond to wait till Monday."

Dr. England grunted in disgust.

"Are there any more questions that you wish to ask Mr. Powell?" asked the psychology professor. "If not, I would suggest that he be excused."

Powell left the room, and the Dean once more took charge of the meeting.

"Are there any questions or suggestions, gentlemen?" he queried.

Dr. England arose.

"Yes, I should like to know who informed you about Hammond's betting."

"Is that necessary?" asked Dr. Martin. "The fact that he has confessed to the statement removes all doubt in regard to its veracity."

"I don't see any objection to telling how we became cognizant of the fact, Dr. Martin," said the Dean, turning to the geology professor.

"The facts were brought out, Dr. England, during our conference with Mr. Powell this morning, as a result of Dr. Martin's questioning. Since Mr. Hammond does not deny them, there can be no doubt of their validity."

"I do not doubt them," returned the old doctor, "but the mere fact that the young man

has been betting is not, in itself, incriminating evidence. But—" the old man arose and pointed a long trembling finger at Dr. Martin—"has it not occurred to you gentlemen, and to you, Dr. Martin, that it is rather unusual for one fraternity brother to be so ready to inform on another, especially when the information is incriminating?"

"Most of you gentlemen have been allied to some fraternities or other in your time. I am a member of the same fraternity as these two young men. I was pledged at Cornell, over twenty-five years ago. I instigated the organization of the present chapter when it became a struggling little local. I helped the boys lease the old house down on the corner, and gave my bit when they bought it ten years ago. I was instrumental in bringing about their acceptance into the national organization. Since the chapter was first organized, I have been a constant visitor at the chapter house. The boys look on me as part of the furniture. I have learned to know and love them, because they have been more or less my own—all the family I have. My fraternal obligation to each of these gentlemen is the same.

"But again I ask you, Dr. Martin, who are yourself a fraternity man and you, Dr. Hadley, and you—and you—and you, who are all fraternity men: is it according to your experience that a man should volunteer such evidence against his roommate, the friend of his family, and his own fraternity brother?"

"Gentlemen, I am an old man. I have known that boy, Hammond, for three years, and I have learned to love and respect him. All of this, I admit, makes me prejudiced in his favor; but as

I stand here today, I am ready to stake my reputation among you—and it is all that I have—that there has been foul play somewhere, and that that young man is as innocent as I am myself.”

The old man sat down and wiped the perspiration from his face. Dr. Martin arose.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “I am sure that we all appreciate Dr. England’s feelings in this matter, and honor and respect him for such feelings; but we must not allow the fact that the doctor is quite rightfully and naturally prejudiced in the young man’s favor, to interfere with our administration of justice according to the evidence presented. It is our duty, in the interests of the University, to deal with the cold facts as we see them; and we must not allow ourselves to become influenced with the personal aspect of the situation.

“As for Mr. Powell, he is of an extremely nervous temperament, and under the stress of the moment was, in all probability, not aware that he was giving harmful evidence against his friend. I think you gentlemen will bear me out in that, from personal observation. Mr. Hammond’s own evidence clears Mr. Powell from suspicion.

“I would suggest, Dr. Hadley, that in view of the fact that we can take no further action until Mr. Hammond has been given an opportunity to produce his evidence, that the committee adjourn until tomorrow at one o’clock.”

The Dean charged them all to maintain the closest secrecy in regard to the affair, and the meeting was adjourned. The professors filed out into the hall and, assembling in little groups, began discussing the situation in subdued tones.

II

Hammond left the Dean's office feeling as though he had just awakened from some nauseating, impossible nightmare. While he had realized that the loss of the money from the *Pelican* safe was in itself a serious matter, he had never even remotely considered the prospect of himself being suspected of the theft. He crossed the campus to a group of trees, and throwing himself down on a bench, finally succeeded in collecting his racing thoughts, and with them some remnant of his accustomed composure.

It had all begun with that cursed Oregon bet of his—no, it had begun with the seeming fortunate chance which had sent him something over three hundred dollars, a bonus for military services during the war. With the money in his pocket, he had, on impulse, covered the bet of an over-confident, over-loquacious Oregonian, and by some cursed streak of ill luck, had won. Then had come the Washington game, and with it a temptation to try to make enough money for a summer's vacation after his graduation in June. He had called the bet of Mr. Christy, a mining engineer, who was a friend of the Powells, had lost his winnings on the Oregon game—and had laid the foundation for this damnable tangle.

Silently and bitterly he cursed himself for the fool that he had been in betting—for not telling some of his fraternity brothers of the bonus check—for not taking Powell with him

when he placed the baseball funds in the *Pelican* safe—for not taking him up to their room before starting for San Francisco.

But Powell had known that he had gone to their room! He had called to Gil to bring his cigarette case from the study table, and Hammond had done so! Why had Les failed to tell this? Had his roommate told the committee of the bet? Powell had been present at the Olympic Club when he, Hammond, had paid Christy, and—yes, by George, Les had been present when he made the bet. Powell had made a wager with a newspaper man, at the same time.

Could Powell know anything about the money? Gil dismissed this idea at once as absurd. Mr. Powell, senior, was wealthy, and allowed his son all the money he needed. And then Les had been in San Francisco. Of course, his roommate was pretty weak in some ways, he recalled. Les gambled, drank rather often, and was pretty lax with his school work; but he could have no motive for being dishonest.

But who had taken the money, and why had he not taken the entire amount? Hammond was mystified, bewildered. He could not forget the failure of his roommate to recall the cigarette case. And Les had acted queerly all the afternoon of the Washington game, had driven recklessly, and had suggested all sorts of ridiculous impossible escapades, after their arrival in the city. The girls, Powell's sister, Evelyn, and Dorothy Paige, to whom Hammond was virtually engaged, had laughingly asked him whether or not Les was having a light stroke of insanity. He had thought nothing of it at the time.

Well, he ought to be able to prove alibis any-

way. Some of the fellows must have seen or heard him come into his room; and someone might possibly have been at home Sunday night, or might have seen him go directly from the station to the fraternity house. He was taking it as though it were a sixteenth century tragedy. Gil told himself to buck up. Two hundred dollars wasn't much, after all. He still had more than that amount from his bonus check, if he should have to stand for the loss, and nobody would believe that he had taken the money, anyway.

Glancing up he saw his roommate crossing the campus. Gil arose and walked to meet him. Powell was rather pale, and still nervous.

"What did they do about it?" Gil asked.

"Nothing. They are going to have another meeting tomorrow, at one o'clock. That ought to give you a chance to get together your alibis."

"By the way, Les," Gil questioned, "why didn't you tell Martin about my getting your cigarette case for you, Saturday afternoon? That would have upheld my statement that I got the money from our room with which I paid Christy, after I had locked the other in the *Pelican* safe."

Hammond glanced sharply at his roommate. Powell's gaze was fixed on the ground.

"I—I didn't think of it at the time," he hesitated. "That infernal Martin was X-raying me, with his snake's eyes, and I was pretty much upset, I guess. I'll fix it tomorrow. By the way—" he shifted the subject hastily— "have you seen Dot yet?"

"No; she came back this morning, with you and your sister, didn't she?"

"Yes. She seemed pretty sore at you for running off last night, I thought. We went to the Orpheum, and to Tait's afterward. Had to take old man Christy along."

"I explained to her yesterday that I had to leave. I thought that she understood," Gil replied.

"Oh, she probably understood, all right. You know how co-eds are. The question is: will that bird, Martin, understand?"

"Gil, ol' man, I feel pretty mean about having to do all this talking about the affair, but when that fellow, Martin, gets his eyes drilling into my bean I have to blab out something. Half the time I don't know what I'm saying. The man has me hypnotized as a blacksnake would a humming-bird. I'd like to wring his infernal old rubber neck for him."

Hammond searched his roommate's face. The look of sincerity appeared to be unmistakable. Les was worried about it all right; and there was a lot of truth in what he had said about the psychology professor. Gil himself had felt uncomfortable under the man's gaze.

"Oh, that's all right," he told Powell. "We were both pretty well worked up about it; but the thing will straighten itself out somehow, I feel sure."

When they arrived at their fraternity house, Hammond went directly to the telephone.

"I think I shall call up Dot," he told Powell. His roommate did not reply. As he gave the number, Hammond noticed that Powell was eying him covertly.

"May I speak with Miss Paige?" he asked the maid who answered the telephone. While he waited, Gil noticed that Powell had moved over to the fireplace, and stood poking aimlessly at the fire.

"Hello!" came over the wire.

"Hello! Dot?" he answered. "Yes, this is Gil speaking."

"Yes?"

"Les tells me that I have done something to incur the Royal Displeasure. I fain would make amends. May I run over about seven-thirty?"

"I think not," came her crisp reply.

"Why, please?" he asked. She was evidently in a pettish mood.

"It isn't necessary."

"Will you please explain?" he asked.

"I am returning your fraternity pin. I think that will be sufficient explanation," came the reply, in coldly modulated tones.

"But—for the love of heaven!—won't you let me see you, Dot?"

"I think not."

He hung up the receiver with a vicious stab; then he looked once more at Powell. Les was still regarding him covertly.

III

Hammond slowly mounted the stairs to his room, and threw himself into an armchair by the window. He was dazed—stunned by the unexpectedness of this latter blow, coming as it did, directly in the wake of the other trouble. For over a year, he had been, according to college tradition, engaged to Dorothy. While they had never formally announced their engagement, her acceptance of his pin was in itself a public acknowledgement of the fact. And they had a clearly defined mutual understanding that the formal engagement would be announced commencement week. Both were to graduate the following June, less than a month away. In a half-dozen cool well-modulated sentences, with no explanation whatever, she had shattered his whole plan of life. And he knew that her decision was final—irrevocable. Dorothy Paige would take no such action without believing that she had ample and sufficient reasons.

“My God! What can the reasons be?” Gil asked himself over and over again. Could she have learned of the money trouble? That must be it, he decided; but who would have told her? Whoever had must have exaggerated the facts. None except Powell and the committee knew of the loss, unless Powell had told. Les had acted queerly since Saturday, but he often acted queerly. He was always nervous and excitable. What reasons could his roommate have for telling Dorothy about the *Pelican* safe’s being

robbed? He and Powell had never had so much as a single disagreement that he could remember. He, Hammond, had often played the part of older brother to Powell. Les had always been weak. More than once Gil had extricated the fellow from compromising situations into which Powell's light-heartedness had drawn him.

Could it be jealousy? Gil discarded the thought. While Powell had gone in for football, he, himself, had starred in track and baseball. Powell was as popular on the campus as he was, although in a different way, and had as much influence in their fraternity.

Could Powell be jealous of him about Dorothy? True, Gil recalled, Powell had "fallen for" Dorothy during his freshman year, when Gil and the girl were sophomores; but then, nearly all the fellows on the campus had undergone a similar experience at one time or another; and, like the others, Powell had seemingly accepted Hammond's appropriation of the girl as a matter-of-course.

But if his roommate had not been scattering the information, who had? Could Powell have stolen the baseball funds, in order to incriminate him? Hammond did not believe it. His roommate was not the kind of fellow to plot deliberately and carry out a crime of that sort. He drifted with circumstances—never made an attempt to alter those circumstances. Besides, what chance had there been for Powell to remove the funds?

The dinner bell chimed, interrupting his dazed fragmentary trend of thought, and mechanically he descended to the dining-room.

The place was strangely silent; there was an air of constraint about the fellows which he noted vaguely, wondering in a dazed fashion at the absence of the accustomed boisterous greetings and banter. The singing of the fraternity song, which always preceeded the evening meal, was listless, forced.

Hammond ate his dinner from sheer force of habit, not because he realized that he was hungry. Once or twice he addressed the fellows to his right and left with listless questions. Both answered in monosyllables. At the end of the meal the house president arose and announced that there would be a business meeting immediately after dinner, requesting that all the members be present, and that those who did not live at the chapter house be notified by telephone. He then informed Gil that it was the wish of the brothers that he should not attend the meeting.

Somewhat astonished, Hammond went to his room; but he gave the matter little consideration, thinking that Powell had probably called the meeting to tell the others of the theft of the baseball funds, and to ask aid of the fraternity in relieving the unpleasant situation.

He thought of his own suspicions in regard to Powell and was ashamed of them. For more than an hour he sat waiting for his roommate to come in and tell him of the action of the others, but Powell did not come. This new situation began to drive the others from his mind. What did the fellows mean, anyway? While he did not doubt the loyalty of his fraternity, he was astonished at this secrecy. Why had the fellows kept him from the meeting?

They couldn't possibly believe him guilty of the theft of the baseball funds. A week ago any one of them would have thought any such suggestion a huge joke.

Finally he went to bed, tossed for two hours, and then fell into a troubled doze. When he awoke the house was not yet astir. Powell had not yet returned. Gil arose to dress.

When Dr. England arrived at the chapter room of the fraternity the meeting had been in progress over an hour. The doctor thanked the young man who had conducted him to a seat and turned to survey the room. Practically the entire quota of *fratres in universitate*, besides several alumni, were present, he noted.

Hadley, the house president, also the son of the Dean of Engineering, addressed the doctor.

"Dr. England, you are aware of the purpose of this meeting, I believe. In regard to the details of the action which has just been taken, it is hardly necessary to remind you that every brother is pledged to the secrecy of the grave.

"Upon careful consideration of the evidence presented, the fraternity has voted to take the situation into its own hands, that Mr. Hammond's name be struck from the rolls of the fraternity, and has further decided that we as a fraternity recommend to the faculty of the University that he be expelled from the institution. We shall assume the responsibility for the loss of the baseball funds.

"Let me say further, sir, that we all fully realize the gravity of the step which we have been forced to take. Never before in the annals of the fraternity has such a step been necessary.

Never has such a blot been on the name of one of its members. While we are all deeply grieved by the necessity of such a step, the evidence of the guilt of Mr. Hammond is overwhelming. In order to preserve the good name of the fraternity, which we all love and honor, this action has been deemed necessary.

“In deference to you, sir, as the oldest present member of the fraternity, we shall be grateful for a few words of approval of the action which we have taken.”

The young man was manifestly deeply moved by the situation. It was equally evident that he considered that the action of the fraternity had been justified.

As the president spoke an expression of horror and unbelief came upon the features of the old doctor. He arose unsteadily.

“Gentlemen—brothers—” he began. His voice trembled with emotion; his wrinkled hands shook and quivered. He steadied himself by grasping the back of a chair, and continued: “Do you realize the seriousness, the horrible meaning of this step which you have taken? Do you realize that the curse of Cain itself could not be more damning than that which, as a fraternity, you have pronounced on this young man whom you have called ‘brother’? Have you considered the fact, my brothers, that in every chapter house in America, to every member of the fraternity in the country—and there are hundreds—this young man’s good name will become a thing of contempt and mockery; that in every university and college in the United States—for these things travel, no matter what oaths of secrecy you may require—his name

shall be a plaything for the gossip of the student body? Do you realize that this action of yours shall be seized upon by every rival fraternity in this institution, or in the country, as a stain with which to smirch the good name of this organization?

"You do well to pledge me to secrecy. Gentlemen, I blush to mention—I blush to think of this action which you have taken. It is a ghastly mistake—I repeat it—it is damnable!

"You speak of the name of the fraternity. What does that name, 'Fraternity,' mean, I ask you? You answer, 'Brotherhood.' But I demand of you: Is this brotherhood, is this the spirit of fraternity which you are showing in condemning your brother in this manner?

"If Mr. Hammond has done this thing—and I am ready to stake my honor that he has not—I ask you, is it a spirit of brotherhood which bids you condemn him? If our brother has fallen, give him the helping hand of fellowship; but let me once more beg and entreat you, as an old man who has always loved, honored and cherished the fraternity, not to spoil the life and blight the future of one of your brothers, in this fashion.

"Mr. President, let me beg of you to reconsider this action!"

The old man sat down, mopping his face with his handkerchief as he gazed around the silence-stricken room. An alumnus of the fraternity, one of the prominent bankers of Oakland, arose.

"Dr. England," he said, "I am sure that I express the sentiment of the fraternity when I say that I honor and admire you for the stand you have taken in regard to Hammond. But

from your words I am certain that you do not understand the facts of the case which have been brought out during the meeting.

“Doctor, Brother Powell, the roommate of Mr. Hammond, has confessed to a personal knowledge that Hammond took the baseball funds. This statement has been amply verified by the other evidence.

“Were it not for the fact that this action was deliberately premeditated, and that Hammond is himself a man past the stage of school-boy pranks, I should, like you, recommend a reconsideration. But Doctor, and gentlemen, a blot is already upon the name of the fraternity. Hammond has knowingly and deliberately placed that blot there. He should have to pay. Definite and decisive action on our part is the only means of wiping out the stain.

“Furthermore, Doctor, is it fair to ask these young men to continue to associate on terms of brotherhood with a man who has been proved a thief?

“Gentlemen, in the face of the facts presented, I wish to urge that the action of the fraternity in this matter be upheld.”

The doctor arose once more, his eyes fixed on Powell, who sat gazing, white-faced, at the floor. The old man started to speak, hesitated, choked. He sank into his chair and buried his face in his hands.

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Clad in his bathrobe and bedroom slippers, with shaving materials in his hands, Hammond opened the door of his room and started for

the bathroom at the end of the hall. On the floor outside the doorway he found a letter addressed to himself, on the business stationery of the fraternity, together with a small package bearing his name in the unmistakable handwriting of Dorothy Paige. The package contained his fraternity pin. He crushed the box in his hand and dropped it into the pocket of his bathrobe.

Turning back into the room he opened the letter and read:

“Mr. Gilbert Hammond,

“Dear sir:—

“It is the will and pleasure of the fraternity that I inform you that, as a result of your actions in regard to the baseball funds, the fraternity has deemed it necessary to drop your name from the roll, and to request that you vacate your present room at the earliest possible date.

“I am furthermore requested to inform you that the fraternity has, as a result of the investigation held last night, taken the matter into its own hands, and will request the faculty that you be suspended from the University without any further investigation on their part.

“This action has been deemed necessary by the brothers and alumni of the fraternity, in order that the good name of the organization shall remain as it has always been, unstained before the world.

(Signed) “J. C. Hadley, House President.”

Hammond crushed the letter in his hand, then opened it and reread it. He was staggered, dazed. It was impossible—unbelievable. He

sat down on the edge of the bed and tried to think. Was this some terrible dream from which he was awakening? He looked at the letter. It was real.

Mechanically he arose and taking his shaving materials, went to the bathroom and completed his toilet. Returning to his room he dressed, hardly conscious of what he was doing. He sat down once more on the edge of the bed and buried his face in his hands. He was stunned. His universe had fallen apart. There was nothing ahead—nothing—nothing. He was a renegade among his fellows, an object of scorn, of contempt. He was accused of a crime he did not commit. The girl to whom he had been engaged had scorned him, refusing all explanations! The men whom he had called brothers for the past three years would henceforth avoid his name as something vile; but they would not forget! The university that he had learned to love for all the things that it had come to mean to him was driving him from her doors as a wretch too vile even for the punishment which she was accustomed to deal to those who came under the ban of her displeasure! Every friend who had come to honor and respect him would be forced to wince at the mere mention of his name!

Slowly the terrible meaning of the future which yawned before him, a stark sinister abyss, devoid of honor, of friends, of all the things which had come to mean life itself to him, sank into his consciousness. Who had done this thing? Powell?

Powell! The name sent a thrill of hatred tingling through his stunned senses. Like the

images of a picture on the screen, the memories of his roommate's face flashed before him. He saw Les as he sat cringing before the committee, denying the thing that would have helped to prove his, Hammond's, innocence! The man had been afraid, afraid—while he himself had been calm!

With his mind's eyes, Gil saw his roommate as Powell stood by the fireplace while he himself had telephoned to Dorothy. He remembered the covert glances which Powell had given him. Les had known—the damned, trembling, sneaking Judas!

Hammond arose and clinched his hands. He dashed through the door and into the hall.

“Powell, you damned sneaking traitor, come out!” he yelled. He jerked open the door of a room and rushing in, pulled the inmates from the bed.

“Where is Powell?” he yelled. “Bring out that damned sneak!”

Like a madman he rushed from room to room. He could not find Powell. Two of his former fraternity brothers tried to hold him. He knocked one into a corner and threw the other against the hall banister. The one obsession filled his brain—to find Powell! He searched the house. Powell was not to be found.

Hammond became conscious of the others as they stood about in their nightclothes, their faces white and unbelieving.

“Get into the chapter room, you damned fair-weather sneaks!” he shouted. They made no move to obey him. He turned to the fireplace and wrenched a baseball bat from a trophy col-

lection over the mantle. Hadley stepped forward and grasped him by the arm.

“Drop that, Hammond!” he commanded sharply. “If you want a hearing you can get it.”

Hammond wrenched free and looked at Hadley. He did not flinch. Here was a man, Gil realized, who at least believed himself to be in the right. He dropped the bat and led the way to the chapter room. As Hadley started to take the chair Hammond interrupted him.

“None of that!” he said. “Don’t think for a moment that you are giving me a hearing. The time for that is past. In this room last night you condemned me without a hearing, to something which would be worse than death to any of you. You gave me no chance to deny the charge. You took the word of that damned sneak, Powell, who hasn’t the manhood—the guts—to be here and back up his lies. I’m not here to deny them now. I scorn to deny them!

“You called yourselves my brothers—swore to abide by the ties of fellowship and fraternity which bound us together. Brothers! You are a set of damned fair-weather brothers! Fraternity! You are too weak-brained to comprehend the meaning of the word! The good name of the fraternity! In your damned snobbish simplicity you hide behind the barrier of a name, and forget the meaning of that name!

“You are a set of weak-kneed, weak-brained, self-centered, egotistical snobs—fair-weather friends! You don’t know the meaning of the word ‘fraternity’! Is there any one of you who wants to deny it?”

He stood gazing from one to another. No one spoke.

"Well," he asked, "do you take it?"

Hadley stepped forward.

"No," he said, "I deny it. So does every other member of the fraternity."

Hammond clinched his fist, but the other held up his hand.

"None of that," Hadley said quietly. "Hammond, I'll admit that we have been pretty hasty in this thing. I think that the fellows are ready to agree with me that you should have had a hearing. But it isn't too late. For God's sake, if you have any proof of your innocence, give it to us. Give us your word of honor that you are not guilty, and we shall withhold our recommendation to the faculty. Be sensible, and meet us halfway in this thing, and we'll do all in our power to straighten it out."

Hammond laughed at him.

"No!" he said. "No! You have repudiated me; I repudiate you! I don't want your help. You think that you have ruined my life. I'll show you. I can get along in the world without your fair-weather friendship. To hell with you all!"

He turned on his heel and went to his room. Going directly to the small clothes closet which he had used in common with Powell, he jerked out his trunk and began piling clothes from the hooks on the walls into the center of the floor. These he threw into the trunk, slammed it together and tightened the straps. He piled the contents of a bureau drawer into a suitcase and tossed a few necessities into a traveling bag.

The door opened and Hadley entered.

“Gil,” he begged, “let me talk to you.”
Hammond regarded him for a moment coldly.
“Get out!” he ordered.
Hadley turned and left the room.

IV

Hammond finished his packing and went downstairs. Unmindful of the curious glances of his former fraternity brothers, now assembled at the breakfast table, he went directly to the telephone and gave a number.

"Hello!" he called sharply. "May I speak with Miss Dorothy Paige?"

After a few moments a faint "Hello!" came over the wire.

"Hello!" he returned crisply. "Is this Miss Paige speaking?"

"Yes."

"This is Gil Hammond. I am leaving the University today—for good. I should like very much to see you for a few moments before I go. Will you allow me to call, or meet me on the campus?"

"No."

"Thank you!"

He hung up the receiver and left the room, his head up, his face coldly determined. On the way down the street he met Dr. England. The old man grasped him by the hand.

"Gil, my son—" he began brokenly.

"It's all right, Doc," returned Hammond. "I know it all, and it's still all right. One thing I want to ask you. Did Powell testify openly to my guilt; or did he make it stick with his damned lying insinuations?"

"My son, I was not present when Powell gave his testimony. I am under an oath of secrecy;

but to me you will always be a member of the fraternity. I do not hesitate to tell you that it was your roommate's testimony which caused this step to be taken.

"But they must not do this thing. They must give you a hearing—they must withhold that recommendation to the faculty. It is a crime, an outrage—"

"Oh, they offered to give me a hearing this morning," Hammond replied. "Hadley even offered to withhold the recommendation."

"Then you are not leaving school? You will fight this contemptible charge?"

"No. The time when I would have accepted a hearing is past. I don't want their help. I never want to see or hear of one of them again. Doctor, I'm going to show them that I can succeed in the world without their help or friendship. If I am not man enough to meet the world without being backed by the empty sham of a name, the meaning of which they have made a hollow mockery, I do not deserve to succeed.

"Doctor, I loved the fraternity—it was everything to me; but I thought the word meant brotherhood, fellowship. They have shown me that it is merely a name to cover their petty narrow-mindedness and selfishness. I hate them! I pray to God I may never look into one of their faces again!

"And as for Powell—damn him!—he shall pay for what he has done, if it takes a lifetime."

"Try not to be so bitter, my son. It will do you more harm than it will the others. And let me beg of you to stay here and fight this thing out. It can be cleared up. You owe it to yourself to do this.

“Go away for a few hours, alone, and try to calm yourself and think things out. Remember that you are not to blame—that it is all a horrible mistake. Try not to be too hard on the boys. They are young, and like yourself, hot-headed. If you prove to them that you are innocent they will be heartbroken over the action which they have taken. Remember that they are merely boys. Most of them are not old enough to comprehend the vital things of life.

“Go think it over, Gil, my son.”

“No, Doc. Even though they were to reinstate me—even though they were to come and beg me to stay, I couldn’t do it. Everything that the place has ever meant to me has been shown to be a mockery. I hate it. I’m going to leave—now, before I meet Lester Powell and kill him.”

“Have you any definite plans?” asked the old doctor.

“No; I’m going to San Francisco. I’ll get a job and cool down for a while. Then I’ll know what to do and how to face things. All that I know now is that I want to get away from here and never see the place again.”

The old man looked at Hammond for a moment.

“Perhaps it is just as well that you get away for a while,” he admitted finally. Taking a card from his pocket he scribbled a few words on it and gave it to the young man.

“Take that to James Stanley, in the Spreckles Building,” he said. “I think that he will give you something to do.

“And above all things, don’t brood or fret over this thing. It is overwhelming, appalling,

I know; but it isn't big enough for you to let it spoil your life. Tell Stanley that I sent you. I'll call him up and have a talk with him."

They had reached the street where the doctor turned off. He stopped and held out his hand.

"It is better for you to leave at once," he said. "I can see that. If you should meet Powell don't speak to him. That is the better way. And remember that the old man hasn't lost faith in you yet and won't forget you. Let me know how you are getting along, or if I can help you in any way.

"God bless you, my son."

"Thank you, Doc," the young man replied. "If you had gone with the others there wouldn't have been anything left. You may be sure that I won't forget."

He grasped the hand which the older man extended, and winced as he did so; for he realized that Dr. England had given him the grip of the fraternity which had blotted his name from its roll.

On the way downtown, Hammond directed a delivery wagon to call for his baggage and leave it at the Southern Pacific Station until he called for it. He caught the next train to San Francisco. He had a sister residing in the city—his only living relative. He must tell her—but first he would get a job.

The prospect of going to work did not worry him. He had always worked during his vacations. One summer he had spent reporting for one of the big San Francisco dailies; another he had worked as chain man on a surveying party in New Mexico; and the preceding summer he had spent in the Forest Service, near

Lake Tahoe. He operated a typewriter and could, if called upon to do so, do office work, although he preferred something in the line of engineering.

To his immediate future Gil gave little thought. Two things loomed before all others in his mind—first, to even the score with Powell; and then to prove to his former fraternity brothers that he could succeed in the world, despite the handicap of their repudiation.

From the Ferry Building we walked up Market Street to the Spreckles Building. On the directory he found the name, "Stanley & Wilcox, Real Estate." He glanced at the business caption without interest. That was as good as anything, for the present, he thought as he took the elevator. He entered the waiting room of the suite marked "Stanley & Wilcox," and gave Dr. England's card to the stenographer who met him.

"I'd like to see Mr. Stanley," he told her. She took the card and disappeared into the inner office.

"Mr. Stanley will see you now," she told him a moment later.

Mr. Stanley was about fifty years old, with a neatly pointed beard and hair lightly tinged with gray. As Hammond entered he arose and held out his hand.

"I am James Stanley," he said. "I shall be more than pleased to do anything in my power for anyone who brings an introduction from Old Tom England."

Hammond winced for the second time that day as he realized that this man also was giving him the grip of his former fraternity.

“Hammond is my name,” he said. “I am looking for a job, Mr. Stanley. Dr. England told me that you might be able to put me in touch with something.”

“Yes, I think that it can be arranged. You have any trouble with ordinary office work.”

“Yes, sir. I worked the summer before entering the University in the office of Stokes & Mason, and since then I have worked off-and-on in the Registrar’s Office at the University. I am familiar with the use of a typewriter, understand stenography fairly well and am pretty accurate at accounts. I don’t think that I shall have any trouble with ordinary office work.”

“H—m,” grunted the other. “Let me see. I might use you here for a month or so. I am pretty hard-pressed as it is. Mr. Wilcox is in Los Angeles at the present time. We are planning to open a branch office in San Jose in a few months; and if you can do the work, we might use you there.

“You belong to the old fraternity, I see.”

He glanced at the ring which Hammond had worn since his freshman year. He had not yet thought to take it off. His face burning, he slowly drew the ring from his finger.

“No, Mr. Stanley,” he said huskily. “Before taking any position which you might care to offer me, I see that it will be necessary for me to tell you that I no longer belong to the fraternity. I was expelled from that organization last night; and left the University today upon their recommendation to the faculty that I be dismissed.

“Despite the fact that I am innocent of the charge with which they accused me, I realize

now the position in which it places me. Dr. England did wrong in sending me to you."

He arose. The older man was amazed.

"But I don't understand—" he hesitated. "If Tom England knew this, why did he send you to me, might I ask, Mr. Hammond? In the business world, one has to be very careful, you yourself realize that.

"Under the circumstances, or at least, until I know more of the circumstances, I'm afraid that I shall have to withdraw my offer. This affair is very unusual—very astonishing, indeed!"

"I understand your point of view perfectly, Mr. Stanley," said Hammond. "Only the circumstances are just as I told you. There isn't any more to tell. Thank you!"

He bowed, picked up the card which Dr. England had given him and left the room. Catching a car up Market Street, he went directly to the home of his sister, who lived on Sanchez Street.

His sister had graduated from the University three years before. She had married one of her classmates, a young man named Hughes who was now employed as sales manager in one of the city department stores. Both Mrs. Hughes and her husband had been steeped in university traditions. They mingled with the younger alumni set who lived in the city. How would they receive his news, Hammond wondered? He dreaded the ordeal of telling them.

His sister met him at the door. Her face showed surprise at seeing him.

"Why, Gil," she asked, "I thought that you returned to Berkeley last night?" She searched

his face anxiously. "There isn't anything wrong, is there, Gil? You aren't ill, are you?"

Hammond caught a glimpse of his own features in the hall mirror. He hardly recognized himself. Well might she ask the question.

"No, Sis. I'm not ill. There is nothing the matter with me. I have been expelled from the University, for stealing funds."

Horror and amazement overspread her features.

"Oh, Gil," she sobbed, "how could you do it? Ralph and I are trying so hard! Oh, we shall be disgraced forever!"

He gave her a look of mingled contempt and pity. Even she, his sister! Was there no one in the world who had faith enough to ask him whether or not he had done the thing? Involuntarily he thought of the old doctor. He, the only one of them all who had had a little faith—faith even the size of a grain of mustard seed! Gil remembered the old figure from his Sunday School days. How long ago that had been!

"I don't know whether or not it will mean anything to you, Sis," he said at last, "but I'd like to tell you that I didn't do it, anyway. I wish you would try to believe me innocent, if you can."

"Oh, but it's terrible—terrible!" she continued to sob. "But you must have done something, Gil. You must have—"

"Yes, I bet two hundred dollars on the Washington game."

"Oh, I knew that there was something. But where did you get two hundred dollars—with you working your way? How are you going to repay the money? Oh, I'll ask Ralph to let

you have it—anything to keep us all from being disgraced! Oh Gil, I never thought that you could do it!”

So she thought that he was there to beg money, in order that he might get himself out of it.

“That won’t be necessary, Sis,” he told her quietly. “There’s one thing that you have to be thankful for, at least. I’m not going to stay around and be a reminder of the disgrace. “Good-by.”

He held out his hand.

She arose. “But where are you going? You can’t run away from it, Gil. Try—try to straighten it out, for our sakes, if not for your own.”

“I don’t know where I am going. It doesn’t matter, anyway. There isn’t anything else that can be done. Try not to think too hard of me, Sis.”

He pressed her hand and walked rapidly away. At the end of the block he turned and waved at her, standing as he had left her, dazed and uncomprehending in the doorway.

V

Hammond boarded a ferry car and caught the Oakland boat. On board the boat he dropped to a bench near the rail and sat gazing out across the bay. His thoughts were racing madly. Vainly he tried to collect them—to grasp the full meaning of the circumstances which had crumpled his little world about him.

Yesterday he was a care-free boy who had never known the meaning of the word “tragedy.” True, he had been doing man’s work; but it had been mere play to him, a part of the game—the necessary part which had enabled the game to continue. All the petty trials and worries had been overshadowed by the sheer joy of living. Time enough for worry, he had thought, after graduation. Then he would throw himself into the business of life, and he would make good—for Dorothy Paige. Each day he had accepted as it came, with its pleasures and its petty worries. While he had never slighted his work at the University—had, in fact, stood high in all his classes and had been a prominent factor in the University life—Hammond had never been forced to take life seriously. Everything had come too easily. Worry had seemed superfluous.

Now, as he gazed out across the bay toward Oakland, through the gathering mist the old tower loomed up like the mocking shadow of his dead yesterdays. Over on the Berkeley Hills he could make out the location of the big

concrete "C" which he had guarded during his freshman year from the dreaded ravages of the foe from down Stanford way. California, his University!

Hammond had come to love the old University during the past three years. It had become a sort of home to him. With no near relatives except his sister, he had no ties which bound him to a home. The University and his fraternity had come to take the place of these. All his intimate friends were among the University students; all his dearest memories were associated with its environment.

He had come to look upon Lester Powell, despite the fellow's weakness, more as a brother than as a friend. Gil had felt a kind of responsibility for him. The others had accepted his "looking after" Les as a matter-of-course. He had believed that Powell possessed something of the same feeling for him.

Dorothy Paige had been the means of kindling not only the rosy fires of his young manhood's dreams, but also of lighting fires of his ambition. She had been the goal ahead, had given him something to work and fight and live for. After graduation in June he was to have taken up that fight. But June was at hand and there would be no graduation—for him. And there would be no fight.

Dorothy had scorned him. His fraternity had expelled him. His sister believed him guilty of a crime he did not commit. His friend had proved a traitor and had made him an object of contempt and scorn. His University had repudiated him! His University! Yesterday it had been his University. Today he was an

outcast. The Italian deck-hand, standing at the bow of the ferry, had as much claim on the institution as did he who had never by word or deed brought a stain upon its good name.

His fraternity—his brothers! Light-headed self-satisfied snobs! At the first sign of trouble, in the very first instance when he had needed their friendship they had cast him adrift!

Hammond clinched his hands and set his jaw. An outcast, was he? Well, he would show them! He could live without their friendship. He was still a man—innocent of the thing with which he had been charged. There was still a place in the world for men. And Powell, the sneak, would pay for his treachery. If it took a lifetime in which to make him do it, Powell should answer. That itself was something to live and fight for. Then there was Old Doc. The old man had not lost faith in him. Of them all, he alone had remained a friend, a brother. That, too, was worth fighting for. Yes, he would fight it out. But where? How? Hammond did not know or care.

In the station at Oakland Gil sat down once more and tried to plan his future course of action. One thing was certain; he would not remain in California. He recalled his conversation with Christy, on the Sunday before, when the engineer had told him of the Montana oil fields and their prospects. He would be unknown there. If he did not care for the work in the oil fields, there would be something else. Yes, he would go north. If nothing better turned up he could go to work in the oil fields. It did not matter. Nothing mattered now.

Hammond still had most of the three hun-

dred dollars from his army bonus. He bought a ticket and checked his trunk to Spokane. His sleeper was already on the tracks. He found the car and leaning back against the cushions in his section, abandoned himself to the bitter turmoil of his thoughts.

Previous to this crisis, Gil Hammond's philosophy of life, if he might be said to have possessed such a philosophy, had been one of acceptance. He had taken life and people as they came, confident that they would always measure up to his expectations as they had done in the past. There had been no need of a definitely formulated scheme of existence for him. His life had automatically shaped itself to meet the conditions as they were, and he had been satisfied with those conditions. He would follow the pattern laid out by so many of his fellows—marry Dorothy Paige when he had become financially able to do so, pursue his chosen vocation, engineering, and continue to live in the old set, each of whom would follow much the same plan.

Such a scheme of life called for no philosophy. It would be merely a matter of following the beaten trail. Hammond had never given much thought to the deeper meanings of life, nor to the rules governing one's relations with one's fellows. They had all seemed definitely marked and fixed. There had been nothing for him to do but accept conditions as they were. Life had seemed good to him. He had been satisfied with it.

He had never given any close study to his fellow students and fraternity brothers. They had accepted him; he accepted them. He had

not looked for motives behind actions, nor weighed characters. The fact that they "belonged" had been sufficient.

In much the same fashion he had come to accept Dorothy Paige. They had been congenial. She, with her beauty, tact and wit had always proved a delightful partner. She had harmonized with his ideals of what a girl should be. He had grown to admire her—more than that; she had come to be a habit with him, the central figure in the pattern by which he had planned to build his life. In all outward respects she had been ideal. Hammond had not known or cared to look deeper.

Hammond was not without ideals; no young man is. But, like those of so many others, young and old, his ideals had been mere abstractions — "loyalty," "justice," "truth," "love," "friendship," "faith," "brotherhood." These abstractions had been like fixed stars in the firmament of his philosophy of acceptance. There had been no deviation in any of them. Faith was faith; there was no intermediate stage. Brotherhood, loyalty, justice, meant just that. There could be no extenuating circumstances—no excuse for those who broke the law. Hammond's law was the old law of the Judges and the Prophets. He had not yet learned to fit his trite abstractions to life, because he had not come in contact with life. In many things he was tolerant, even lax; but those which he termed the "big things" were inviolable.

And now all the stars in his firmament had proved to be will-o'-the-wisps. His justice, friendship, loyalty, faith—what were they?

Empty words—the mocking memories of a fool's dream! Brotherhood! He winced at the word. Of them all that had meant the most to him. It had been the symbol of all that had made his life worth while at the University; and that symbol had proved to be the bony skeleton of an outstretched hand and an empty skull, grinning at him from the shield of a fraternity emblem!

Was there no reality in life, no truth, justice, brotherhood? He thought of Dr. England. Was the old man duped, fooled at the meanings of life, as he, Hammond, had been?

Yes, there was a reality—hatred—a burning, aching reality! Hammond had never felt it before. It surged through his consciousness in waves of fierce desire, causing the hot blood to pulse and flow and his hands to clinch and open in spasmodic reflexes.

Unconscious of the passing of time, he sat alone in his section, wrapped in the galling bitterness of his thoughts. Twilight came and gradually faded into darkness. A porter entered and switched on the lights, but Gil was unmindful of the change. At last he became conscious that others were crowding into the adjacent sections and filling the car with the drone of their conversation.

Finally a bell clanged. The train began to move. He sat up. As it slowly rumbled through the Oakland yards and plowed into the darkness Hammond realized that he was leaving his old life behind—utterly. The future stretched ahead like the darkness, empty and foreboding. What did it hold for him?

Hammond finally aroused himself from his

lethargy. He looked at his watch. It was nine-thirty. The porter was already making up the berths for the night. Gil arose and went back to the smoker. He lit a cigarette and sat down by the window.

The smoker was empty save for himself and a man who was carefully brushing his teeth at the wash basin. Hammond glanced at him casually. The man was short and heavy set. He was in his shirt sleeves; his suspenders hung down from his shoulders. His collar and tie lay on the shelf above. A traveling man, a "drummer," thought Hammond, as he turned and gazed out at the window.

Finally the other finished his toilet and sat down.

"Traveling man, buddie?" he asked casually, glancing at the Legion pin on Hammond's coat. Gil turned rather impatiently. He was not in a mood for the usual smoking room conversation.

"No. Traveling," he returned shortly. The other held out a card.

"Parks is my name," he said easily. "The Great Western Knitting Mills, Salt Lake. See you are a Legion man. Going to Portland?"

"Yes."

The other nodded. "Stopping off there myself," he said. "Have a drink?"

It was evident that the other was determined to be friendly. He drew a silver-mouthed flask from his hip pocket and held it out. Hammond was not in the habit of drinking, principally through lack of inclination, but just now the other's offer seemed good to him. Perhaps the

whiskey might help him forget— He took a drink and held out the flask.

“Thanks. Good stuff,” he said.

“Ought to be. It’s the real thing. None of your home brew. Got it in ’Frisco yesterday. Take another. You look all in.”

Hammond took another. The whiskey was good. It had a pleasant “kick.” He thanked the man again.

“Don’t mention it,” replied Parks, taking a drink himself. “What outfit were you in?” he asked.

“Twenty-third Engineers. I was attached to the First Division most of the time.”

“That so? Must have seen some service. I was with the Eighth Infantry. Got in on the Army of Occupation for a while, after it was all over. Well, I think I’ll hit the hay. See you later.”

Gil bade him good-night, and turned again to the window. Previous to the events of the past few days he would have accepted Parks’ actions at their face value, as an example of the camaraderie of Legion men and of all travelers. Now he found himself weighing the man’s motives, looking for some design back of his friendliness. Parks had seemed to accept the Legion badge which Gil wore as a sort of fraternal bond between them, and had presumed upon it. Fraternal bond! What personal advantage was the traveling man seeking for himself? Gil bit his lips and frowned. The suggestiveness of the little blue and gold emblem sickened him. He took the pin from his lapel and thrust it into his vest pocket. From his recent experiences

he was already reaping the bitter fruit of cynicism.

Left alone with his thoughts, Hammond smoked several cigarettes. Finally he sought his berth, but he could not sleep. He tossed for two hours, finally dressed and went back to the observation-car platform. Seated in an arm-chair, with his feet propped on the rail, he watched the black silhouette of foothills as they glided past. Finally the monotonous pounding of the train quieted his overwrought nerves. He fell into a troubled doze.

When he awoke it was morning. The air was cold. He went back to the smoker, shaved, and bathed his face and arms. He felt better. He was hungry. Finally the porter came through bawling the information that breakfast was now served in the dining car. Hammond went ahead and ordered a substantial breakfast.

While he was waiting for it to be served, Parks, the traveling man, came in. He greeted Hammond heartily and dropped into the vacant chair opposite him.

"There are a couple of live birds looking for a poker game back in the next car," he told Gil. "How about the A. E. F. joining forces and trying them for a few hands?"

So that was Parks' game, thought Hammond. Good enough. If the other could trim him, let him do it. The game might serve to keep his mind away from his own bitter reflections.

Later, as they seated themselves around a table in the observation-car smoker, Hammond had a feeling close akin to pleasure as he realized that here was a chance to try out his newly acquired philosophy—the philosophy of self.

Every man should be a foe until he had proved himself to be a friend, each one a crook until he had proved to be honest.

Coldly he studied the faces of the other three men around the table. Parks appeared to be jovial, voluable—a typical drummer. Possibly this was a pose. He would see. One of the others, a rancher obviously, from his dress, who had been introduced as Mr. Holt, from the Yakima, struck Gil as being just what he claimed. The fellow's halting speech and rather boorish bearing did not indicate any great intelligence. Possibly he had been picked for a "sucker" by the others, as Gil had been himself.

The third member of the group offered more material for consideration. He was a Jew named Hirsch, from Chicago, he informed them. He did not state his business.

As they cut for deal Hammond watched the play of the Jew's expressions. His eyes were small, deep-set and shifty. He seemed nervously anxious as he looked at his card.

"You win the deal," Parks told him as the Jew held up a king. "What'll it be, gentlemen—draw or stud?" Parks was banking.

Holt indicated his preference for draw. The others appeared to be indifferent.

"All right professor; let'er go," said Parks. "Dollar limit, jack-pots, joker wild. Is that satisfactory, gentlemen?"

Holt objected to having the joker in the deck. Hirsch would not consent to having it removed. Hammond watched them with a cold smile. Parks was grinning broadly.

"Guess we'll have to compromise by having the joker good for aces, straights and flushes,"

he said. The others agreed to this and Hirsch dealt.

Gil opened on a pair of kings, getting two tens in the draw. Hirsch and Holt did not stay. Parks drew three, called Gil's dollar bet and won with three jacks. He seemed greatly pleased with his winning.

"Figured me for two little pair, eh, Hammond?" he grinned. "Never mind; the game's young yet."

Hirsch won the next hand on jacks and deuces. He had bet a quarter. Holt called with jacks and fours. The next few hands were not important. Hirsch won again, then Holt. Gil stayed for all of them, but did not make a pair.

Three deals went without openers.

"How about decorating the linoleum with one buck each, to make it interesting?" asked Parks.

Gil and the Jew shoved in their chips. Holt mumbled something about not making it too strong, but finally anted his dollar. Hirsch once more had the deal. Gil watched him closely. The Jew shuffled nervously, Parks cut and Hirsch dealt clumsily, placing the pack close to his right hand instead of in the center. Gil passed and Holt opened on a pair of kings. All stayed. Gil drew one, Holt three, Parks two and Hirsch two. Holt bet a dollar.

Gil had been watching Hirsch carefully. Suddenly the porter looked in to see if anything was wanted. As Gil looked up at the porter he glanced back in time to see Hirsch's right hand disappear beneath the edge of the table. The hand appeared a moment later holding a match

which the Jew had taken from his coat pocket; but Gil noticed that the deck now had the top card—the cards were marked with the figure of a woman—facing the other way. Hirsch had stolen the top card.

Parks raised Holt's dollar, bet another dollar, and Hirsch also raised the limit. Gil had been watching Hirsch carefully for the appearance of the stolen card. Evidently it had been a bad one. Hirsch made no attempt to take it from his pocket where Gil was sure the Jew had slipped it.

After a moment's study Hammond raised the bet another dollar. Holt called and Parks raised. The Jew followed suit. Gil raised again. He had not called the Jew for his suspicious move because he believed that Hirsch had not used the stolen card. Gil was gathering data. Holt, influenced by the size of the pot, called the raises. He hoped vaguely that the others were bluffing. Parks grinned and threw down his cards. After a moment Hirsch did likewise.

Gil's four queens took the chips; and he had gathered some data.

"Figured you for a bob-tailed straight that time, Hammond," said Parks. "But when you came back that last time I had a hunch that there was something doing."

Hammond dealt. Hirsch was frowning. Holt seemed to be taking his loss stoically. On the next hand he won a fair-sized pot. Hirsch had to go to the bank. He cursed the cards on the next deal and threw down his hand.

"How about a little action in this thing?"

he asked. "Want to change the limit? Let's make it a man's-size game."

"Sure, we'll give you action," grinned Parks. "The sky's the limit, so far as I'm concerned. What say, Hammond?"

"Suits me," Gil replied. Holt, who had practically broken even so far, dropped out, but continued to watch the game. "Too steep for me," he grunted by way of explanation.

Parks dealt. With the limit removed, interest became more intense. Without realizing it, Gil became oblivious to everything except the game. He continued to watch Hirsch and Parks. The latter had lost his air of amused nonchalance and like the others, gave his whole attention to the game.

Hirsch opened. On the draw he took two cards, Gil three, Parks one. Hammond had noticed that Parks was careful to keep the deck and the discards in the center of the table. His suspicions of the fellow began to lessen. Possibly Parks was on the square after all.

Hirsch bet ten dollars. Gil glanced at his cards. He had held two aces. On the draw he had got a jack, another ace and the joker, making four aces! Hirsch had asked for action. Well, he would get it!

"Going up ten," Gil said carelessly as he slid in his chips.

Parks' eyes narrowed as he studied his cards. He had drawn one.

"Good place to bluff, gents," he said. "It will take just fifty berries to see these. Want to read 'em an' weep, Hirsch?"

The Jew's right hand lay on the deck, his cards held below the edge of the table in his

left. His right hand twitched nervously. Gil had watched him closely during the deal. So far, everything had been straight.

"Come on in and get your feet wet," Parks goaded. "You asked for action."

Hirsch hesitated; his hand was trembling more visibly.

"No; didn't make it," he muttered, throwing down his cards.

"How about openers?" Parks asked. He reached over and exposed the Jew's hand—a queen-full, on tens.

Hammond reached for his chips and started to raise. Parks looked at him sharply and moved his head in a barely perceptible negative. Before Hammond could speak he had laid down his hand, a straight club flush, jack high!

"Knew I had you beat, Hirsch," he said carelessly. "I've shown 'em so you'll know I wasn't bluffing. You fellows held pairs and threes to begin with. I had you both figured."

He raked in the chips, winking at Gil as he did so. For a moment Hammond was dazed. Parks had deliberately refused to take his hundred dollars, if not his entire roll; for he would have raised fifty and called another raise by Parks. The salesman had upset his data; the Jew had verified it.

Mechanically he dealt. This time Parks opened. Gil stayed for the draw and made three queens. He called Parks' five-dollar bet and won. Parks had kings and tens.

"Might have stood a little raise there, bud-die," he told Gil.

"Like fun, you would," the other replied.

Parks failed to deal openers. They "sweet-

ened'' the pot and Hirsch took the pasteboards. Gil opened with a pair of aces. Parks failed to stay. Both the others drew three. Gil bet ten and Hirsch raised ten. A moment later he met Gil's twenty-dollar boost with a fifty-dollar one, thinking to scare Hammond out. Instead, Gil called and won on three kings.

Again Hirsch threw down his cards.

''Deal a round of stud,'' he snapped.

''Want more action?'' grinned Parks.

Hirsch did not reply.

Gil dealt three, face down. Hirsch allowed his to slide over the edge of the polished table top and flutter to the floor. Gil saw the card; it was the ten of clubs.

''Never mind,'' he said. ''I'll bury the next.''

''Deal it face up,'' Hirsch ordered. He buried the first card.

''Just as you say,'' Gil returned. He dealt three, face up.

''King bets,'' he said.

Parks bet a dollar.

Gil had a three in the hole and a seven up. He folded. Parks drew a jack, Hirsch an ace. The Jew, with an ace and ten in sight, bet five dollars. He had a pair of tens, thought Gil. Parks called. Hirsch drew a seven, Parks a jack, making a pair in sight. He bet ten dollars. Hirsch raised him ten. Parks called. Gil was surprised. Was the Jew bluffing? He drew another seven, and Parks a four.

Hirsch now had an ace, a pair of sevens and a ten in sight; Parks a king, a pair of jacks and a four. He bet twenty-five dollars; the Jew raised him a hundred. Parks called, and turned

up a king in the hole—two pairs, kings and jacks.

Hirsch turned up—the ace of hearts!

“Reckon I got a little action that time,” he grunted, as he started to rake in the chips.

Hammond grabbed his hands and jerked him to his feet.

“You had a ten of clubs in the hole,” he said. “I saw it fall to the floor. Cash in and get out!”

The Jew, trembling but furious, cashed in his few remaining chips and left the smoker without saying a word. The “action” which he had got had cost him the hundred and fifty dollars’ worth of chips which he had bought.

“Thanks, buddie,” said Parks. “He would have got me that time. I knew he was crooked, but didn’t catch the little slight-of-hand trick.”

“We’re even, Parks,” returned Hammond. “Shake on it. You could have taken a hundred or more from me, on that straight flush.”

“Oh, I couldn’t rob a buddie,” grinned the salesman. “Well, be seated, gentlemen. We’ll have an honest sociable game of penny ante or two-bit limit. What say, friend Holt?”

“I’ll play with you fellers,” the rancher replied. “I saw that Jew tryin’ to rob the deck; that’s why I dropped out. I saw that ten of clubs, too. He got action all right. I’ll say! Haw, haw!”

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Hammond arrived in Portland the following morning. He found that his train for Spokane left in half an hour, but that another would fol-

low in the afternoon. He decided to take the former train.

After saying good-bye to Parks and Holt he sat down in the waiting room. What had been the motive behind the salesman's actions on the train? Had it been friendship, a feeling that they had something in common because of the little Legion pin and what it stood for? He had studied Parks' face, and in spite of his recently acquired cynicism, could find nothing but honesty written there. Yes, there must be something to the idea of brotherhood after all. Doc England had lived up to it, and Parks had done likewise. But the others, his friends, his sweetheart—those whom he had trusted! The bitterness and cynicism was returning.

He found himself studying the faces of those passing through, or seated around the waiting room. It was an interesting study. In many faces he could read little. In others he found expectancy, anxiety, eagerness. In some he saw pride and complacency; in a few he detected arrogance—scorn. What was back of these masks which hinted so much, and told so little? What thoughts were responsible for the expressions? What were the motives and driving impulses which had left such a variety of records on the features of the various persons?

Thoughts, motives! What a part they played in the scheme of life! What marks they left on the faces of their owners! Was his own face marked? Hammond wondered. What story would the marks tell?

He arose, and going to the men's dressing room, stood in front of the mirror and studied his features. The face he saw was strangely set and unfamiliar. What a change three days

had made in his own expression. He had never worried about his looks. His features were passably regular, there was a humorous twinkle in his eyes and he had been blessed with a slow whimsical smile. In a man that had been enough.

Now the smile was gone. His lips were tight-pressed. His eyes had lost their sparkle; they were cold, steely. His cheeks were hollowed. Blue rings were forming under his eyes. In three days—three days of hell—they had done this to him!

Had they? No; it had been his thoughts—thoughts! Who was this new Gil Hammond who had been created by three days of bitterness? Was it himself? What a different self! And yet, he liked this new self. It seemed strangely appropriate—seemed to fit in with his thoughts. Hammond had learned something, merely an old truism, that thoughts make the man.

He returned to the waiting room and continued his study of faces. Presently an eastern train pulled in, and the usual throng of passengers crowded into the waiting room. An elderly lady who had been seated opposite him, upon whose face he had read the legend “anxiety,” arose and stood watching the doorway expectantly.

A young girl entered, and the two, hurrying toward each other, exchanged warm greetings. As they passed where he was seated, Hammond caught a scrap of their conversation.

“Were you anxious about me, Aunt Margaret?” the girl asked. “I wired you from

Sand Point. Oh, but it's good to see you again!"

Gil did not catch the elder woman's reply. His attention had been held by the face of the girl. It was a beautiful face; with shining eyes, flushed cheeks, smiling lips. How different its story from the ones he had read in the other faces; how different from the one he had read in his own! In it he read joy, vitality, youth. Its keynote was happiness. Hammond wondered at the thoughts which had sponsored its smiling radiance.

At any time he would have been attracted, but in his present state of morbidity he was doubly impressed. The girl's expression was like a challenge to him. What had she to be so damned happy about? Where did she get all her blaméd confidence? There had been a sort of joy in his bitter reflections. Now that joy was gone. The girl had unconsciously spoiled it. He felt as though she had robbed him of something. He was just a little ashamed.

After a few moments he arose and crossing to the newsstand, picked out a cheap magazine with a luridly painted cover, depicting a villainous-looking man with a bloody knife in his hand, and a wild-eyed horror-stricken girl clinging to his arm. He then boarded his train which had just been announced.

Throwing himself into a seat in the rear of the pullman, he turned the pages of the magazine, glowering at the weird pictures of hideous, distorted villains, smirking heroes and simpering heroines which came to view. But Gil was not frowning at the lack of art in the pictures, although he was not aware of this, nor yet be-

cause of the bitterness of his thoughts. Instead of the dismal figures before him, he saw another picture. It was a vision of joyous eager youth—mocking him with its confident radiance. And as he grimaced at the tawdry magazine before him Hammond frowned and bit his lip—and was ashamed.

VI

Hammond arrived in Spokane at dusk the following day. He went to the Coeur d'Alene Hotel and secured a room. But he was not sleepy. Wandering about the streets, he finally entered a motion picture place, from which he had heard the music of a pipe organ. He found a seat near the rear and moving over to the wall, hunched down and listened to the music. There was something soothing about the darkness of the place and the gracious swell of organ tones.

He paid little attention to the picture; was merely conscious that the array of smartly-dressed figures were doing uninteresting things, with the conventional English country estate for a background; but the music left him with a soothed feeling close akin to pleasure. He was surprised to find that he was still capable of enjoying anything.

But the wave of bitterness which had flooded his consciousness and wracked his being for the past few days was gradually wearing itself out. He was beginning to get something of a normal perspective on conditions as they existed. His normal self—not the old self; the carefree boy of the week before would never exist again—the new Gil Hammond was beginning to rise above the wreckage of his yesterdays. He began to feel anxious to take up the daily routine of life once more.

He did not leave the theatre until an ad-

monishing "Good Night" had been flashed upon the screen. On the street, he became conscious that he was both tired and sleepy. He went to his room and slept soundly.

Next morning he decided to hunt up an employment agency and learn something about the Montana oil fields. In the advertising columns of the *Spokesman-Review* he found several agencies listed. The nearest was only a few blocks away. He would go there.

As he walked up the street, Hammond noticed the legend, "Forest Service," on several windows of a building opposite. He stopped on the corner for a few moments and studied the building. The previous vacation he had spent as a fire guard in the Forest Service. It had been a pleasant summer. He loved the big outdoors. It was clean, better than the oil fields.

He crossed the street and looked at the directory of the building. The district forester's office was located on the upper floor. He found the room and knocked on the inner office. A pleasant-looking man opened the door for him.

"Come in," he said cordially.

"You are Mr. Cox, the district forester?" inquired Hammond.

"The same," smiling.

"Mr. Cox, Hammond is my name. I am looking for a job with the service. Perhaps you will be good enough to put me in touch with something."

"I see. Any experience, Mr. Hammond?"

"Yes. I was fire guard last summer at Sula, in the Cascade National Forest. I have had considerable experience in the woods."

"College man?" asked the other.

“Yes.”

“Forestry?”

“No; engineering. I have had three years of civil engineering at the University of California.”

“Good. Yes, I think that we can fix you up, Mr. Hammond. In fact, we have been looking for a man with some experience for a job in the Cabinet, over in Montana.”

He scribbled on a card and handed it to Gil.

“Take this down to Stillenger, in Operations. He will fix you up, Mr. Hammond.”

Hammond arose and thanked him. The forester held out his hand.

“If you are the man we have been looking for, the thanks will be on our side,” he said. “Good luck.”

In the operations department Hammond found that he was to be sent to the Beaver River Ranger Station, in the Cabinet National Forest, near the Idaho line, where his duties would be assigned him by the ranger at that station. He was to receive one hundred and twenty-five dollars, and expenses.

“You can leave for Beaver River this afternoon, on the N. P., if you wish,” Stillenger told him. “You will find Lane, the ranger up there, a good man to work with. I have known him personally for several years. He is one of the best rangers in the service.

“We run the fire-control headquarters here, you see; and the fires around Beaver River have been pretty bad for the last three or four years. We’re pretty sure that someone sets them, but can’t get proof of it.

“Drop in, if you should by any chance run

up to Spokane. We'd be glad to have you."

Hammond went directly to the Northern Pacific Station. He found that by hurrying he could catch Forty-two, the next east-bound train on the Northern Pacific line. He checked his baggage to Noxon, the closest station to Beaver River, and boarded his train, which was now waiting on the track.

In the day coach he was conscious of a feeling of relief that it was all settled. He had the prospect of a summer of agreeable work. The actual necessities for the immediate future were provided for. His condition was no worse than that of hundreds of other persons who had really committed crimes. And he had done nothing to be ashamed of. At least, his conscience was clear on that score. Why should he worry about the future? Up here no one would know his story, or would care to ask about his past. That had been left behind with all its associations. Now he was absolutely "on his own."

The thought was pleasant. As a boy he had read stories of other boys going on wondrous voyages and journeys of adventure. He had longed to go on similar voyages, into some distant unknown country, away from everything that he had known.

Well, this was an adventure. What the future held for him was a total mystery. The conventional blue-printed plans which he had used to plot his future were destroyed. Let life bring him what it would. He was still a man; he would meet the future like a man. After he had secured a better grip on himself he would plan what to do about Powell and the California trouble. At present he could do nothing. Rage

and worry only made things worse. He would wait.

Gil arrived in Noxon in the afternoon. The place was merely a "tank town," boasting two stores, a somewhat disreputable looking hotel, two building which had formerly been saloons and a half a dozen other buildings. He inquired of the station agent about transportation for himself and his baggage to Beaver River Station.

"Lane is in town with his rig," the man told him. "He might take you up. You'll find him over at the store."

He indicated a building opposite the station. Hammond crossed the street and inquired of a boy behind the counter as to where he might find the ranger.

"That's him," returned the youngster, indicating a tall man in the rear of the store. The man was helping another, evidently the proprietor of the store, pack canned goods and packages into a dry-goods box. When Hammond addressed him he arose.

"Yes, I'm Jim Lane," he said, taking the letter from the Spokane office which Hammond held out. "I'm very glad to meet you, Mr. Hammond. I've been begging the Missoula office for a man for the last month. McGloughlin wrote me that he had asked Cox to send some one, if he could find the right man. He got one sooner than I expected."

"Is your baggage over at the station? I'll take you right up the river with me tonight."

The ranger was a big thoughtful-looking man, with a suggestion of sly humor in his clear gray eyes. Hammond liked his looks. There was an

open frankness in the man's looks which seemed to dispel the distrust which Gil had come to feel toward every one whom he encountered.

When Lane had finished his purchasing, Hammond helped him carry the box to a buckboard standing at one end of the store platform.

"Now we'll collect your stuff and be getting up the river," the ranger said. "It's quite a drive. We'll have to hurry to make it before dark."

They drove out across the railroad track and down a cottonwood-shaded lane to the river. There was no bridge, but a ferry boat with its long, drooping cable spanning the stream, stood at the other side. Lane gave a hallo, and after a few moments a man came down to the landing and began whirling the big steering-wheel in the center of the heavy boat. Hammond watched him push the awkward craft away from the shore with a long pike-pole. Soon the boat was caught in the current and began making headway across the stream.

"That's Sam Wah. They call him 'Hampton's Chinaman,' most of the time," Lane told Gil, indicating the man on the boat. "The old fellow must be sixty or seventy years old. He has lived here on the Hampton place for the last ten years. No one knows anything about him. Sometimes he goes away, without saying anything. He always comes back in a week or two. Never tells where he has been. The old fellow is quite a character. There must be an interesting story connected with him, if one could get at it."

As the ferry drew up to the landing the old Chinaman straightened it out with a turn of

the wheel and drove it home with the pike-pole.

"Business pretty slow today, Sam?" the ranger asked pleasantly.

"Velly quiet day—all samey Sunday," the Chinaman replied in a soft, expressionless voice.

The old man was indeed a character. His face reminded Hammond of that of an Egyptian mummy. The skin was tightly drawn over the cheek bones; around the eyes and mouth there were innumerable wrinkles; like that of a mummy, the face was expressionless, save for the eyes. These were singularly clear and piercing. They seemed to contradict the rest of the old man's features, to belie his age.

Lane drove his rig onto the platform of the ferry. The Chinaman re-set the wheel and again pushed off into the current. They began to travel steadily toward the opposite shore.

"Are there many ranches up Beaver River?" Hammond inquired.

"Oh, yes; the valley is pretty well settled. There are some fine ranches up there. And a little timber is left. Most of that went out years ago, though. The best that's left is in the forest reserve. That has been saved by a miracle. The fires have come pretty near wiping it out several times. Luckily, it escaped the big nineteen-and-ten blaze. That cleared out most everything around here."

He indicated the mountain ranges to the south and west. They bore evidence of having been swept clean. In many places they were being re-covered with a thick growth of lodge-pole and jack-pine.

"Stillenger was telling me that you have been

having considerable trouble with fires," Hammond said. "He hinted that some of them had been set. Do you have any theory as to the persons responsible?"

"More than a theory; but nothing to work on, as yet. I'll tip you off to some suspicious characters, one of these days," the ranger told him.

Lane glanced at the Chinaman. Gil thought he detected a meaning in the forester's look. He was surprised. The idea that the innocent-looking old Chinaman could have anything to do with the setting of forest fires seemed ridiculous.

The boat drew up to the landing and Lane drove ashore.

"Bad business, working for the Forest Service, Sam. All work; no pay, eh?" he asked.

"Velly bad business. Gov'ment no likee pay."

The ferry was toll-free to the Forest Service.

Lane handed him half a dollar. "Well, here's something for your work, anyway, Sam," he said.

The Chinaman's features relaxed a bit. His eyes seemed to twinkle for a moment. Then his features recovered their set calm.

"No tell gov'ment; gov'ment no care," he said. "Thanks allesame."

The road led them down the river, through a magnificent forest of yellow pine. The sun filtered through the tree-tops, now and then touching up the tree trunks and undergrowth on either side of the road with pleasing high-lights. Occasionally they passed a recess in the trees in which some home steader's cabin squatted, its

new pine shingles glistening in the sun; but for a stretch of three or four miles the forest was unbroken. Now and then a timber grouse, or "fool-hen," as Lane called it, would fly up from the side of the road and go whirring away through the trees; and an occasional pine squirrel would scold them from behind some protecting pine trunk; but aside from these, no sound save the light rattle of the buckboard wheels and the thud of the horse's hoofs broke the pleasing forest silence.

"That's the Clark's Fork of the Columbia," Lane told Gil, indicating the river which they had crossed, now visible through a vista in the trees. "Beaver River empties into it about five miles below the ferry.

"By the way," he continued, "we were speaking about forest fires back there. I didn't care to talk before Sam. No one knows anything about the old rascal, although he has a good enough reputation. Still, I have a suspicion that he may not be quite as innocent as he looks. Anyway it's best not to take chances.

"I might as well give you the straight of this fire-setting business now. Two or three years ago I caught a fellow named Meighan, cutting sawlogs from government lands and putting them into the river with his own logs. Meighan was a good-for-nothing fellow, a sort of general trouble-maker, and a confirmed drunkard. I reported him and he was tried and sent over the road for three years. His two sons, Cliff and Bill, were mixed up in the deal, but managed to get out of it. Since then they have been making trouble whenever possible.

"Bill was sent to the penitentiary for six months, on a moonshining charge, last year. He's out now. He's the worst of the three—sneaking, underhand. Cliff would be a rather decent sort if he were left to himself. He's merely a good-natured bully—affects the 'bad man' stuff, and believes himself to be pretty tough; but Bill and the old man are thoroughly bad. Old Man Meighan openly swore that he would get even with me, when they convicted him; and Bill has made repeated threats. I'm pretty sure he's back of the fire-setting. I'll point them out to you when I get a chance. You might have a run-in with one of them. Anyone connected with the Service is contraband so far as either of the three is concerned."

"Is the father out of the penitentiary yet?" asked Gil.

"No; his term expires pretty soon, I think. When he does get out I expect there will be trouble of some kind. Still, it's all in the day's work. I'm not worrying a lot."

The ranger did not appear to be laboring under any great mental strain. The more Hammond saw of the man the better he liked him. Gil had begun to study faces. Lane's was the kind to command confidence. He was of the type often seen in the Forest Service—big, good-natured, honest, sincere, with enough dry humor in his make-up to render him thoroughly likable.

They came out of the forest into a broad canyon, meeting the river at right angles. Down the canyon a good-sized stream foamed and splashed over the rocks.

"That's Beaver River," the ranger told Gil.

“Mighty good trout fishing in there a little later. If you are a fisherman, you’ll be getting out your tackle one of these days. There is an old trout that hangs out in a pool, up near the ranger station. He has been, figuratively speaking, making sport of our local Isaac Waltons for three or four years. The youngsters have named him ‘The Submarine.’ If you are anxious to become a local celebrity, better try your hand at hooking him.”

Gil was a fisherman. Between the Meighans, his duties at the station and the fishing prospects, the summer’s outlook appeared to be broadening. He found himself unconsciously responding to the ranger’s friendliness. But the bitterness of his recent experiences still rankled. Suppose Lane should find out what had happened to him. Would he continue to be friendly, in spite of it? Now was the time to find out.

“Mr. Lane,” he began, after a lull in their conversation, “there is something I probably ought to tell you before taking up the summer’s work. I—”

He was interrupted by the coughing of a claxon around the bend, ahead of them. A battered Ford car rattled into view. Lane pulled the horses over to the right, in order to let the car pass. Just before the machine came alongside it swerved suddenly to the left.

“Look where you’re driving!” Lane yelled. As he did so the Ford struck the rear hind wheel of the buckboard, throwing the rig over on its side and hurling the two occupants to the ground.

Hammond caught on his feet. With quick

presence of mind he scrambled to the horses' heads and grasped the bridles. Lane picked himself up from the roadbank, where he had been pitched. The machine had stopped a few yards down the road. The two occupants got out and returned to the overturned buckboard. Lane glared at them angrily.

"Are you fellows blind?" he asked. "Why didn't you look where you were driving?"

The two men swaggered up and stood, hands on hips, looking at the overturned rig.

"Go 'long, you damned nurse to the jack-pines!" the younger of the two returned belligerently. "Keep your rattle-trap over where it belongs, if you don't want to get it hit. This road's free. Don't get cocky, or you're liable to get smashed on the nut. I've been looking for a chance to do it, anyway."

Lane walked over in front of the speaker and stood for a moment looking him in the eye. The other was taller than the ranger; both were powerful men. The forester's fist shot out like a piston, catching the fellow on the point of the chin. He sprawled backward in the dust. In a twinkling he was on his feet again, and the two of them were on the ranger. As they closed Lane gave the older man an upper-cut to the jaw, which staggered him for a moment, then he closed with his first antagonist.

Hammond dropped the reins and sprang at the older man, who had whipped out a knife. He caught the fellow by the wrist with his left hand and gave a twist which brought the man's side to him. Then Gil swung with all his strength to the jaw. The man staggered to

the roadbank, tumbled over and rolled into the bushes below.

Hammond turned to Lane. The ranger's opponent had him down and was raining blows on his unprotected face. Gil grasped the fellow by the shirt collar and jerked him to his feet. The other swung with his left and landed on the side of Gil's face, making him dizzy for a moment. His assailant was on him in a flash, showering long-arm blows with his left hand.

Hammond had boxed considerably. Instinctively he guarded his face from the other's blows. He clinched with the man, and for a moment they grappled. Lane had risen to his feet, wiping the blood from his face. He sprang in to help.

"Keep off—get the other!" gasped Hammond.

The other man had scrambled back into the road a few yards below the struggling group. Hammond suddenly broke from his opponent's grasp and swung at his face. The latter ducked and stepped back. The older man grasped him by the arm and held him. He had evidently had enough. He turned to Lane and broke into a volley of profanity and obscene epithets.

"Never mind, you sneaking government boot-licker! I'll get you yet! And when I do it'll be dead to rights! Don't you forget it!" He pulled the younger man down the road, and they drove off, shouting back at Gil and the ranger.

Lane wiped the blood from his face with a bandanna and turned to Hammond, who was gingerly feeling of a rapidly swelling lump

on his own face. Lane's features relaxed into a grin.

"That was pretty work," he said, holding out his hand. "If you hadn't pulled him off when you did, I imagine I should have been pretty much the worse for wear, about now."

Hammond grasped the outstretched hand.

"Wow!" he panted. "That was short and sweet—very sweet! You certainly handed that lanky galoot a good one to begin with. How did he happen to get you down?"

The ranger bared his left arm. It was rapidly swelling. "Must have sprained it when I fell out of the rig, I guess. He gave it a wrench when we grappled, and I tumbled.

"Well," he went on, "you seem to have hit Beaver River in the nick of time. Old Man Meighan is out of the pen once more. The galoot was his son, Cliff."

VII

The ranger looked at the overturned buckboard. One rear wheel had been slightly damaged, and packages and canned goods were scattered all over the road. After Hammond's promptness in checking their first excited dash, the horses had made no attempt to run.

"Well, let's right her," said Lane. "I think that hind wheel will hold till we get home. If it doesn't, we'll have to rig up a skid. You're booked to have a pretty eye there, in a little while. Not the kind of reception you were expecting on Beaver River, eh? You appeared to be enjoying the one you got, I must say. Can't speak the same for our friends, the Meighans."

They righted the buckboard and collected the scattered load. "Guess we'd better stick a couple of false spokes in that wheel. All the dish has been knocked out," Lane said.

Hammond cut two small maple bushes, about two and a half inches in diameter, making them equal in length to the diameter of the wheel. These he threaded through the spokes, on either side of the hub, and sprang them into place so that they caught over the fellers, but would not protrude beyond the tire. The false spokes restored the "dish," or concave arrangement of the spokes.

"That ought to hold," Gil said. "Better let me drive," he continued, after they had once more climbed into the buckboard. "That arm

of yours looks pretty bad. May give you trouble."

The ranger allowed him to take the reins.

"It looks as though you have let yourself into it for keeps, Hammond," he said as they drove up the canyon. "From now on, you and I will be in the same boat, so far as the Meighans are concerned. It's lucky Bill wasn't along with the others, or we might have gotten the worst of it."

"Well, I'm glad things have come to a showdown," Gil replied. "Now we know where we stand."

"Yes; still, I don't think they will attempt any desperate measures. Both the old man and Bill have just finished prison terms. That will make them a little afraid. We'll have to be on the lookout for underhand work—fires and the like."

"I know something of the type," Hammond replied. "We'll keep on the look out for trouble. Our little set-to back there left me feeling considerably better, in spite of the decoration."

He tapped his disfigured eye which the swelling had now almost entirely closed. "I've been more or less down in the dumps for the last few days," he explained. "Our scrap served as a pleasant reaction."

"Glad you look at it that way," grinned the ranger. "I was beginning to think that the reaction might be getting just a little too strong, especially when Cliff had me down. But ours is the triumphal procession; and we have quite a modest showing of decorations, although not all of them, I'm thinking."

It was after dark when they finally arrived at the ranger station.

"My wife will think that we have been fighting with a grizzly when she sees your face and my arm. I'll tip the good lady off that the present handicap to your manly perfection isn't permanent, though. You two will like each other. You both have the same delicate and decisive mastery of touch. When you have been around a while, you will see that I am hopelessly hen-pecked, Hammond. But it is a pleasant state of servitude, and I am content. My wife is a queen, if I do say it."

The ranger lived in a neat, roomy bungalow, across the road from the station itself. Hammond helped him stable the horses and carry the boxes to the kitchen porch.

"Come right in," Lane said heartily. "You'll pardon me for bringing you through the kitchen. We don't stand much on ceremony up here on the River. Mabel," he addressed his wife who met them at the door, "this is Mr. Hammond, who is going to work with me this summer. We had a little mix-up with the Meighans down the road a way; and both of us bear the marks of honest endeavor. If you'll get some bandages and things we'll try to make ourselves a little more presentable."

"Come right in, Mr. Hammond," she said with a smile. "I'm pretty well accustomed to bumps and bruises. Jim is always falling off the woodshed or bumping his head against the cellar doorway. He's worse than a small boy. And of course he makes me tie up his bruises for him. First aid first; then supper. I im-

agine neither of you will be reluctant on that score."

"Reluctant! I feel like a vast empty void! I'm a howling coyote in December! Do you feel such symptoms, Hammond?"

"That hits me just about right," he agreed. "I also have a strong feeling of kinship to a toy balloon, just at present."

"Yes, I detect a rather marked family resemblance to that article in your anatomy. Come in here. We'll fix you up in three shakes."

Lane led the way to a small bathroom, equipped with modern conveniences. "Here's warm and cold water," he said, "and here's towels and soap. When you're through Mabel will fix you up. You're sure a sight for sore eyes."

Gil bathed the dust and blood from his face and hands. When he had finished Mrs. Lane dressed his cheek with a bandage saturated with a pungent-smelling liniment. "That will burn for a while," she told him, "but it will take the swelling out. You will be as good as new in a day or two. There are brushes on the bureau, if you wish to tidy yourself up a bit. Jim will be ready in a minute, and then we shall have supper."

Jim Lane's estimate of his wife had been pretty nearly correct, Gil told himself, as he brushed the dust from his rumpled blue serge suit and made himself otherwise presentable. No hostess of his acquaintance could have met the situation with more tact or composure. She had accepted their blood-stained faces without a trace of excitement, without a question. With a few well-chosen pleasant words, she had put

him absolutely at ease. The total lack of ceremoniousness in either the ranger or his wife struck Gil as being especially admirable. They were undoubtedly persons of considerable taste and refinement; and they made a handsome pair, he thought later, as he watched her arranging the supper table.

As they seated themselves around the table, Lane glanced about the room. "Where is 'The Tornado'?" he asked. It seemeth unusually quiet and peaceful, methinks."

"He went to sleep on the sofa, and I put him to bed," Mrs. Lane replied. "'The Tornado' is Jim's latest inappropriate nickname for our family, aged five," she told Gil. "His real name is Jim, of course. I call him Jim-Jams."

Her husband looked at her in mock astonishment.

"Inappropriate!" he said. "If you could see the place when His Excellency has just finished his afternoon diversion, and has consented to indulge in a short siesta, you would think that the name is mild."

After they had finished the excellent meal which Mrs. Lane had prepared the forester took Hammond across the road to the ranger station. Seated in the small well-kept office, Lane proceeded to outline the summer's work.

"Aside from the usual routine of a ranger station, the biggest part of the work will be looking after forest fires," he told Hammond as he lighted his pipe. "Better light up," he added, indicating a tobacco jar and several pipes in a rack over the desk. "I can talk better with a full pipe. It seems to soothe and regulate the turbid torrent of my thoughts."

Hammond selected one, and Lane went on.

"The fire season usually starts about the first of July up here. There are three look-out stations which have telephone connections with this office. During the fire season, someone has to be here all the time, of course. In case of a big fire, we shall be compelled to employ a large crew of fighters. Each crew will have a capable man in charge. There are several ranchers around here upon whom I can rely in case of emergency. We usually employ a few smoke-chasers and general handy men. With their help, we can attend to all the little blazes ourselves. The big idea is prevention, of course. We aim to get the little ones before they become big ones."

"Do you have many lightning fires?" asked Gil.

"No; with the ordinary run of lightning fires and accidentals, control would be easy enough; but today's events indicate that we shall have the Meighans to contend with. If I had any actual proof against them, I would not hesitate to swear out a warrant and send all three of them back to the penitentiary. Unfortunately, there is nothing to work upon, as yet.

"I have considerable tracing and blue-print work which ought to keep us both busy until the fire season opens. That will give you an opportunity to size up the situation and get acquainted with the community. Practically all the ranchers except the Meighans, are my friends up here. You will find that it is a pleasant community to live in, on the whole.

"Another thing I might as well tell you is that there has been considerable moonshine dis-

tilling going on up here around the lake. Undoubtedly, the Meighans are back of it, and I have a hunch that our old friend, Sam Wah, has something to do with the disposing of the liquor. The sheriff has been up here two or three times, but hasn't been able to locate anything.

"I'm not going to play the part of sneak or informer, nor will I expect you to; still, if the Meighans should be sent over the road on a moonshine charge, it would undoubtedly simplify our summer's work."

Hammond lay awake for an hour or so pondering the events of the day.

"We'll put you up over at the house, for the present," Lane had told him. "Later we'll fix up that room next to the office for you. You'll take your meals with us, of course. I'm glad you are a companionable sort of fellow. Mabel and I are rather gregarious; we like to have people around."

Despite the distrust which the events of the past week had aroused within him, Hammond could not doubt the sincerity of the ranger's statement. As he lay in the clean fresh bed to which Lane had shown him, the thought that had worried him on the way up the river returned. What would the Lanes think of him, were they to learn the reason for his leaving California? Would they turn from him as his former friends had done? Should he tell them; would it be fair to keep them in ignorance of the events of the past week—to accept their friendship on such terms? He decided that it would not. No matter where he might go, he could not get away from the thing, he thought bitterly.

Tomorrow he would tell the ranger the whole story, he finally decided. He felt that Lane would believe him. If he didn't—well he, Hammond could move on. The afternoon's episode had caused him, for the second time since their occurrence, actually to forget his troubles. And the lapse of memory had lasted the entire evening. Powell, his fraternity brothers, the investigation committee, Dorothy Paige—. Was there no escaping them, or the thing that they had done to him? No; it had become a part of his life, would continue to be a part of it.

Dorothy Paige! A week before he had dreamed of a home, modest, neat—something like the ranger's, with Dorothy for its mistress. There would have been a big fireplace—prattling children. Now that was ended. She had ended the dream with her abrupt "No!" Even though she desired it, if his innocence should be vindicated, the old status could never be resumed. The girl had killed something in his feeling for her. Not that he could blame her for her action; still, she might have had a little faith—a little faith! Had any one sworn to him that Dorothy, or Powell, for that matter, had done a dishonest thing, he would have called the man a liar, would have fought him. To Hammond love meant faith also.

Had he actually loved Dorothy? He wondered. The fact that she doubted him did not weigh heavier than the distrust of the others; it only made him bitter—disillusioned. No; it could not have been love; that would have lasted. He only felt regret and bitterness because the Dorothy Paige whom he had idealized had never existed except in his mind.

And Powell—for him there was no regret; only bitterness and hatred. With his mind's eyes Gil once more pictured his former roommate's pale face, his shifting eyes, his twitching fingers, as they sat before the committee. The cringing, sneaking traitor!

"Damn him! Damn him!" he muttered to himself, as he lay there in the dark, clenching his hands in the bitterness of his hatred.

Suddenly, by some strange trick of the mental processes, the picture shifted; the cringing Powell was forgotten. Gil saw himself once more in the waiting room of the station at Portland, studying the faces of his fellow travelers. A vision of eager, smiling, confident youth crowded the others from the background of his consciousness—mocked him with its joyous radiance; made him ashamed of his bitterness.

Had he really seen that face?—was it merely a fancy which his imagination had created—like his idealization of Dorothy Paige? Would he ever see the face again?

Presently, Gil fell asleep and dreamed that he was in his office in California, fighting the Meighans and Powell—for a picture in an oval silver frame—the picture of a smiling, radiant girl—the girl he had seen in the station—

VIII

When Hammond arose next morning the sunlight was already streaming into his bedroom window. The Lanes greeted him with a hearty "Good morning!" when he joined them in the dining room.

"This is James, Junior; alias Jim-Jams; alias The Tornado," said Lane, indicating a tow-headed be-overalled youngster who, perched on the sofa, was assaulting a tindrums with a tack hammer in a solemn and business-like manner.

"It's rather early for him to be up; and he hasn't had his breakfast yet," Lane went on. "Pretty soon he'll be getting into action with a vengeance."

Jim-Jams surveyed Hammond with frank interest, although he gave no evidence of suspending operations. Mrs. Lane smiled at the youngster from the kitchen doorway.

"Jim-Jams' future seems to be assured," she told Gil. "Anyone with his delicately attuned ear for noise must be destined to become either a great musician or a boiler-maker."

"Do you know anything about Fords?" Lane asked, after they had finished breakfast. "Elizabeth, our domestic transportation agency, seems to have suffered from an attack of perverseness. I've tried to coax her with new spark plugs, but she refuses to respond to my advances. See what you can do to remove her indisposition."

Hammond grinned at the ranger's droll sentences.

"I'll try to diagnose the case," he said. "Might be lucky enough to stumble on the trouble. Did you examine the coils?"

"Yes, and the connection seems to be all right. She doesn't spark properly, though. Elizabeth is a creature of moods and temperament. It may be her digestion."

Hammond looked over the wiring and found the insulation rubbed away from one of the strands.

"Found it, I think," he said. "Have you some tape?" Lane tossed him a roll; Gil wrapped the exposed wire and then cranked the car. It started without any difficulty.

"Must be getting near-sighted," Lane observed, as he replaced the pliers and wrenches in the tool box. "By the way, I'm going to town again this morning," he went on. "Anything I can bring you from the store?"

Hammond did not recall anything. He was well supplied with outdoor equipment.

"How about your mail?" Mrs. Lane asked from the doorway. "We usually have our mail sent up by one of the ranchers, whenever possible. You might have Jim make the same arrangements for yours."

Hammond flushed. He would be getting no mail.

"That—that would be all right," he hesitated.

He winced as he realized that this was the opportunity to carry out his decision of the night before. He would have to tell the ranger. If Lane did not wish to keep him he would return with him to Noxon.

"Mr. Lane," he began, after the ranger had turned the car around and was preparing to drive down the road, "there is something that I feel that I ought to tell you about myself, before accepting your's and Mrs. Lane's hospitality. I won't be getting any mail up here, because none of my friends or relatives know where I am. While I have done nothing that I am ashamed of, I can't accept your friendship under false pretenses.

"I left California because I had been accused of a crime. I didn't do the thing they accused me of, but everyone believed me to be guilty. I'll tell you the details, and if you wish me to leave I shall do so—"

"Tell me nothing," the ranger interrupted. "As for your leaving, you'll do nothing of the kind. I need you here. It makes no difference whether you are accused of robbing a bank or of kidnapping a movie actress, so long as I have your word that you didn't do it. That goes with me.

"All of us have our ups and downs, Hammond. I've had mine; I can allow for the other fellow. Let me say that I have had considerable occasion for judging men, in my life. My judgment tells me that you are on the square. I'm willing to trust it. Shake hands and forget it."

He held out his hand. Hammond grasped it warmly.

"But I'd rather give you the whole story, Mr. Lane. Then there won't be any chance for a misunderstanding—"

"No; it isn't necessary. Later, if you wish, or if I can help you in any way, you may tell me. Just now the thing for you to do is to

forget your trouble and get a grip on yourself. Things have a way of turning out right, if you give 'em time. You hang around here today and take things easy. Monday we'll start on the blue-print work."

The ranger waved at his wife, who stood in the doorway, and drove off. Hammond watched him disappear down the road, leaving a dust cloud behind. A choking sensation arose in his throat. Lane had accepted him without a word of explanation; and the ranger had known him but one night and half of one day; yet he had given him his faith and friendship! That was brotherhood—Dr. England's type of brotherhood—the kind which Parks, the traveling salesman had practiced! The fact that it was scarce made it worth all the more.

Now Gil had something else to fight for, to justify this big man's confidence and friendship, as well as that of the others, and to prove his innocence. The settlement of his account with Powell would include the latter.

Lane's words made Gil feel like a new man. There was a reality in the world after all. His ideals had not all been mere boyish sentimentality. He had found genuine faith, friendship; perhaps he might find the others—even love. Who could tell? At least, he could meet life as it came, and accept what it might bring.

His trunk stood on the platform in front of the station. Gil dragged it into the little room back of the office which the ranger had assigned him for later use. He opened the trunk and took out a pair of hob-nailed boots, khaki army trousers, a flannel shirt and stiff-brimmed stetson. A heavy black and red plaid "stag"

shirt lay where he had stuffed it, together with his baseball sweater, with its big block "C." He tossed the shirt on the cot beside the window and folding the sweater neatly, replaced it in the trunk. It had meant a lot to him—that big sweater, with its letter; and now he had no right to wear it—perhaps would never have again.

Dressed in his out-of-doors outfit, he returned to the house. Mrs. Lane was doing her housework. Jim-Jams sat at the piano, pounding out dismal discords, in his serious business-like fashion. As Gil entered the child turned and surveyed him critically in his new costume.

"You goin' fishin', Hammon'?" he inquired. "Let me go wis you."

"No, I hadn't thought about it. Still, it might be a good idea; but I haven't any fishing tackle, son."

"My papa's got lots. I'll show you!" The youngster jumped down from the piano stool and led the way to the kitchen.

"Jim-Jams suggests that it might be a good plan for him and me to go fishing this morning, Mrs. Lane," the young man told her. "I wonder if I may borrow Mr. Lane's tackle?"

"Certainly. Jim said that you would probably want to go fishing. He left his basket and rod on the refrigerator, on the back porch. There are some salmon eggs in the basket, and I'll get his fly hook for you; but you needn't bother with Jim-Jams, unless you wish. You stay with Mamma this morning, Sonny-boy, won't you?"

"Sonny-boy" gave her a reproachful look.

"I wanna go fishin', Mamma," he stated emphatically.

"He wouldn't be a bother at all, and I'd love to have him, unless you object to his going, Mrs. Lane. The trip was Jim-Jams' suggestion, you know," Gil urged.

Mrs. Lane smiled at the eager youngster. "All right, I suppose he'll have to go. But he will probably frighten the trout and end up by falling in the creek. Make him stay right beside you, Mr. Hammond."

Hammond promised to keep Jim-Jams out of danger, and he and the youngster set out for the creek.

"You goin' to catch the Submarine, Hammon'?" queried Jim-Jams. "My papa caught him one day. I saw him. But the Submarine got away. My papa's been makin' a lot of new flies. He says he's goin' to get the Submarine nex' time."

"Where is the Submarine, son? I might make a few casts at him, just for luck," Gil answered, remembering that Lane had mentioned the "Submarine."

Jim-Jams started ahead at full speed. "Come on, Hammon'!" he shouted. "I know where he is—I'll show you!"

Gil smiled at the youngster's enthusiasm. "Hey there!" he called to the fleeting Jim-Jams; "go slow a bit. I'm a cripple today. The Submarine will wait for us, Sonny."

"Oh, I saw him once, Hammon'," called Jim-Jams, as he waited impatiently for the other to catch up. "He was all speckled and red and—and about so long, I guess." He spread his pudgy hands something like two feet apart.

“Must have been a whopper,” Gil grinned.

The boy led him across the meadow to the river, here little more than a large creek. Hammond rigged his pole and began to cast out into a broad pool which indicated possibilities. Jim-Jams was all for an immediate attack on the Submarine's stronghold, but Hammond decided to fish down stream to the pool. Finally his expectations in regard to the place were realized. He felt a sudden twitch of the pole and a silvery speckled body splashed the surface of the pool into circling wavelets.

Immediately Jim-Jams went into ecstasies. Hammond played his fish neatly and finally landed him. Whereupon Jim-Jams sprang upon the floundering trout and held him clasped to his breast.

“I got him, Hammon’! I got him!” he shouted, clutching the wriggling fish manfully.

Gil was convulsed at the youngster's antics. He released the trout from the hook, and threading a twig through his gills, gave the fish to Jim-Jams to carry. This satisfied the boy for the moment, and Hammond continued his casting. He caught two more trout within the next few minutes, to the supreme gratification of Jim-Jams, and then continued down the stream to another pool, where he caught two more. After a few moments he hooked again. This was a big one, and Hammond had considerable difficulty playing him.

Jim-Jams, grasping a small shrub which grew on the bank of the pool, leaned over the edge, open-mouthed, watching the performance.

“Look out!” Hammond called to him. “That bush is giving way!” The warning came too

late. The shallow-rooted shrub broke away from its fastenings, and Jim-Jams slid down the bank, feet first, into the pool. The water came up to his armpits. Hammond dropped his pole and leaning over the bank, caught the youngster by the arm and pulled him dripping from the creek.

"Now you've gone and done it, Jim-Jams," he remonstrated. "I told you to be careful."

Jim-Jams surveyed himself with unruffled composure.

"I guess I got wet," he said solemnly.

Hammond chuckled at the youngster's matter-of-fact acceptance of the situation.

"I'll tell the world you did," he said as he landed the trout, which had continued to struggle at the end of his line. "Well, it's home and dry clothes for you, Son. We'll postpone our attack on the Submarine until a more opportune moment, figuratively speaking. Your mother will probably have me electrocuted, as it is."

Jim-Jams looked astonished. "Oh, Mamma doesn't care," he replied with the assurance of past experience. "I falled in with Papa, and she just laughed."

Jim-Jams' prediction proved correct. A smiling Mrs. Lane met them at the kitchen door.

"I knew that it would happen," she told Gil. "He never goes out with his father without coming back just dripping. Don't mind, Mr. Hammond. Jim-Jams is accustomed to it, I assure you. And the strangest part of it is that it doesn't make him sick."

Jim-Jams himself broke into the conversation.

"Oh Mamma, Mamma," he cried, "we caught a big one, and another, and I falled into the creek. I'm wet. See?"

"I should say I do see! You come right with me and get into some dry clothes. And if you get them mussed up before your father comes back I'll put you to bed—do *you* see?"

Jim-Jams evidently did not "see"; for, as she led him away, Hammond heard the boy telling her in very excited tones of the first fish which Gil had caught.

"—and Mamma, I falled right on top of him, like I did the old rooster the other day, and he didn't even squawk. Mamma, why don't fishes squawk? Why don't they?"

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Hammond spent the rest of the morning putting his room at the ranger station in order. It was a comfortable little place, with a window facing south, up the valley. He fastened a number of hooks to the wall, and built a shelf over them. To this he hung a curtain which Mrs. Lane sent him by Jim-Jams, giving the impromptu wardrobe an appearance of neatness. An army blanket spread over his steamer trunk made a comfortable window seat.

On the wall he tacked various curios and souvenirs from his trunk, taking care to leave out everything that would remind him of California. By the time Lane returned the little room had assumed a cozy, home-like appearance. The ranger helped him bring a heavy table, covered with green billiard cloth, a battered though serviceable dresser, with a good

mirror, and several chairs from the storeroom above the office. These completed his furniture.

By the time they had finished arranging these Jim-Jams came to inform them that the noon meal—they called it dinner, of course—was ready. As they sat down Lane handed his wife two letters.

“One’s from Helen, I think,” he told her.

“I must read it right away,” she exclaimed, as she opened one of the letters.

“Helen is my younger sister,” she told Gil. “She has been spending a few days on the Coast. She expects to visit us this summer.”

“She’s a schoolmarm,” Lane added. “When she comes you’ll probably have an opportunity to brighten up your education.”

Hammond thought he detected a meaning twinkle in the glance which the ranger exchanged with his wife.

“Oh, she’s not *that kind* of school teacher, Mr. Hammond,” denied Mrs. Lane.

“Still, a schoolmarm is a schoolmarm, my dear. You’ll have to admit that.”

He winked at Hammond. Mrs. Lane gave her husband a withering glance.

“I was a teacher, Jim Lane, before you married me, wasn’t I? You never let the fact cast any damper on your exuberance of spirit. I actually believe you are trying to prejudice Mr. Hammond against my sister, without his ever having seen her. You make me furious.”

“My spirit is humbled, my dear,” said the ranger in mock humility. “I grovel in abject submission. You win, Mabel. A schoolmarm is not a teacher; and a teacher is not a schoolmarm. Black is white. Helen is an angel.

I am a monster—a base schemer. But my intention was innocent, my dear. I was only trying to do this young man a favor—to bid him take warning from my own heart-breaking example; but it's no use—no use! You see—” turning to Gil—“I haven't a chance in the world. She takes my own miserable plight and hurls it in my very teeth to mock me. Behold, behold how the mighty have fallen!

“Still, the wages of slavery aren't so terrible. One grows hardened to the captivity—”

He grinned maliciously at his wife, who would not condescend to reply to his oration.

“Helen will be here a week from tomorrow,” Mrs. Lane said as she folded the letter. “I do wish, Jim, you would try not to be so flippant.”

Hammond noticed that she gave her husband a smile very much like the one she had given Jim-Jams, when he returned dripping from the river.

“Very well, my dear; I'll try,” returned Lane.

“You see how it is with a hen-pecked husband, Hammond,” he said, with a look of pseudo-resignation.

IX

During the next few days, Hammond rapidly adjusted himself to the routine of the ranger station. He found the work quiet and pleasant. Save for a fit of brooding now and then, he did not allow himself to worry over the California trouble. The Lanes lost no opportunity to extend him their courtesy and friendship. With a few discreet words, the ranger gave his wife an inkling of the situation in regard to Gil's troubles; and Mrs. Lane, by innumerable small actions, tactful and friendly, strove to make his days pleasant ones.

In his small and noisy way, Jim-Jams did much to help Gil forget his troubles. The youngster had taken a strong liking to Gil, and dogged his footsteps whenever possible. Brooding and bitterness, in the face of the boy's rapid fire of questions and profound optimism, became an absurdity.

One afternoon Lane handed the young man a copy of the local paper, the Noxon Ledger.

"Begins to look as though we were booked for a little oil excitement up here on the river," he said, pointing to a front-page article with the heading, "Beaver River Well a Certainty."

Hammond glanced at the article.

"The proposed Beaver River oil well is at last a certainty," he read. "The Northwestern Oil Company, which has been doing considerable investigating of oil prospects on the river, gave out yesterday, through their representa-

tive, Mr. C. E. Parker, of Great Falls, that the proposed well is to be drilled immediately.

“Based on the reports of the geologist which the N. W. sent to investigate the field, and on the confirmation of Mr. Harrison Christy, a mining engineer and oil man of undoubted reputation, leases have been secured and a test-well is to be spudded in at the earliest possible date. The location of the well has already been decided upon. A standard rig will be shipped here within the week.”

But Hammond was not thinking of oil prospects on Beaver River, just then. The paper had said that Harrison Christy was connected with the enterprise. That meant that the engineer undoubtedly would be on the ground while the proposed well was being drilled. Christy knew Hammond's story. Would the man tell what he knew? Christy had seemed to be a decent, likable fellow. Still, the chances were all in favor of his telling of the California episode, should there be any occasion for his doing so.

Gil wondered whether or not it would be best for him to leave the river. For all he knew, there might be papers out for his arrest in California. Christy might inform the University authorities of his whereabouts. Let him. Gil decided that he would stay and face the thing. He could not run all his life. No matter where he went, the thing seemed to follow him. No; he would stay and fight it out. Let Christy say what he might. Lane would stand by him, Hammond felt. And the ranger undoubtedly needed someone upon whom he could rely for the summer's work.

Since their fight with the Meighans, neither Hammond nor the ranger had encountered either of the three. The older son, Bill, Hammond had never seen. But the ranger was certain that the ex-convict would try to make good his threat, and that he was only waiting for a suitable opportunity to do so.

Frequently, when the afternoon's work was completed, Lane would take the younger man for an hour or so of fishing. The ranger was an ardent fisherman and was very skilful in wrapping and painting flies. Sometimes the two were accompanied by Jim-Jams, who usually succeeded in getting into mischief of some form or other.

On one of these afternoon excursions Lane took Gil to the pool in which the much-talked-of trout, the Submarine, was reported to keep himself. Thereafter they usually managed to make a few casts into the pool when either of them happened to be out fishing. On several occasions they succeeded in catching trout in the pool, but none which might have been mistaken for the Submarine. Hammond began to think that the fish was a myth, although Lane assured him that he had hooked the trout, and several others claimed to have seen him.

One day Flathead Joe, an old Indian who had been employed to do odd jobs around the station, told the young man a rather fanciful story about the trout, stating that it was the returned spirit of an Indian princess, and that "big medicine" would be needed to catch the fish. Although Gil smiled at the story, the old Indian's tale gave the trout a rather romantic interest. The young man began to spend many

of his leisure hours down by the big pool with its flickering green shadows.

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The week passed almost before Hammond realized that it was gone. On Sunday morning the ranger backed "Elizabeth" out of the shed and prepared for a trip to town. There had been a heavy rain the night before, removing for the present all danger from forest fires.

"Better come along, unless you have something else to do," Lane urged. "My wife's sister, Helen, is coming in on Forty-two today. You heard Mabel speak of her. If she can stand our kind of life, she will spend several weeks up here."

Hammond agreed to go.

"Better not dress up," Lane told him. "Sunday doesn't call for it up here on the river; and it looks like more rain. Besides, we might have another rough and tumble with our good friends, the Meighans. They will be in town today, as it is Sunday, and will probably be drunk. I don't want any trouble on my hands, with Helen along; so I'm taking this as a moral persuader."

He drew a thirty-two automatic Colt from his trousers' pocket. Hammond glanced up at the deer's foot rack, upon which hung several rifles, and three or four revolvers, in holsters.

"Shall I take one?" the young man asked.

"Yes, if you wish. Of course, it probably isn't necessary, and if it were, the guns could be used only as a last resort. You understand that. Rangers are allowed to carry weapons.

We aren't violating any law by carrying the guns. An automatic is a mighty forceful argument; many times it prevents trouble."

Hammond thought the ranger's precautions were rather needless. But he selected a thirty-two Colt police revolver from the rack, and strapped a shoulder holster under his woolen shirt. Mrs. Lane gave her husband a list of things to get at the store, which Lane told Hammond, would be open till noon, and they drove away, with Jim-Jams wailing lustily to be taken along.

When they arrived at the ferry they saw that the river had been swollen considerably by the recent rains. It now rushed along, a surging, muddy flood, instead of the clear, lazy stream which Gil had first seen. The old Chinaman was not in sight. Lane gave a hallo, and after a few minutes Sam Wah and a man on horseback came out of the woods where the road turned down the river and boarded the ferry.

Hammond's attention was attracted by the rider. The man was tall—he appeared to be over six feet. He was powerfully built, and sat on his horse with an easy grace. He wore the leather, brad-studded chaps of a cowboy, with a gray sombrero, its brim twisted into a rakish droop. Close-cropped black hair was visible under the hat. His eyes were dark, close together, small and shifty. His nose was beaked, like that of a Jew, but there was nothing of the Jew in his expression. His mouth was loosely set, drooping at the corners. The fellow reminded Hammond of a cowboy villain of the movies. He did not speak to Lane.

"If they strike oil up on the river, we'll prob-

ably get a bridge here," Lane said as the ferry plowed its way across the surging stream. "As it is, all heavy traffic has to go around by Bear-tooth. This ferry is pretty uncertain, especially during high water. It has broken loose a few times—came near drowning some people last year. Washed up on that little island down there, or they would have gone over White Horse Rapids, to the left of the island. The current is stronger to the left this year. Anyone cut adrift wouldn't have a chance."

Gil noticed that the man on horseback was listening closely to what Lane said. The rider turned and looked at the ranger with a curious expression on his face. When they reached the landing he rode ashore, without waiting for the Chinaman to secure the boat with the usual hitch around a pile.

"Who was the cowboy?" Gil asked as they drove into town.

"That was Bill Meighan," Lane replied. "Wonder what he and Old Sam were doing out there in the bushes. Moonshine cache, probably. Bill might have been getting tanked up for the week-end."

When they arrived in Noxon the streets were lined with buckboards, trucks and cars. Sunday was market day for the ranchers from the outlying districts, Hammond learned. There was also the usual number of people who had come to town simply because the day was Sunday, and they had nowhere else to go. Most of the men addressed Lane with words of good-natured banter. A few made jocular remarks about his encounter with the Meighans. It was evident that the affair was public gossip.

Hammond looked about the street for Bill Meighan, but he was not to be seen.

The east-bound train was due in a few minutes. Lane purchased the list of articles which his wife had given him, and placed them in a box, on the running board of the car. Hammond made a few purchases himself, including a complete outfit of fishing tackle. By the time they had finished their buying, the whistle of the incoming train sounded up the track. Lane drove in front of the little station. The train drew up and the usual few straggling passengers began to alight.

A slow drizzle had begun. Hammond put on his army raincoat, and stood by the car, watching, with considerable curiosity, the passengers alight. Suddenly he noticed Bill Meighan, who had come from the rear of the station, standing near Lane, in front of the entrance to the train.

A girl, smartly dressed in a neat, becoming traveling suit, was descending the steps of the Pullman. Suddenly Meighan pushed forward, and elbowing the porter aside, assisted her to the platform. Gil caught a glimpse of her features.

She was the girl he had seen in the station at Portland!

Thanking Meighan with a smile, she turned to meet Lane, as he pushed his way through the little knot of platform stragglers. The ranger and the girl exchanged hearty greetings; then he glared for a moment at Meighan, who, with an elaborate bow, had doffed his sombrero in answer to the girl's smile of thanks. He stood bareheaded in the rain, smiling with a derisive, sneering leer.

Gil started forward; but the ranger turned and led the girl to the car.

"Helen, I want you to meet Mr. Hammond, who is assistant ranger up at the station this summer. Miss Frasier, Mr. Hammond," he said easily, as though nothing had happened.

"How do you do, Mr. Hammond?" Helen smiled pleasantly, as she held out her hand.

Hammond was again conscious of the joyous lilt in her voice which had first attracted him. As they shook hands, a warm flush mounted beneath his coat of tan. He was glad of the rain. He helped her into a front seat beside the ranger and took a rear seat. Lane and the girl chatted pleasantly as they drove to the river, Helen plying her brother-in-law with a variety of questions.

At the ferry they found the boat drawn up to the landing; but the Chinaman was nowhere to be seen. The boat itself was locked to the landing. Lane, because of his connection with the Forest Service, had been provided with a key, in case of emergencies. He drove the car onto the platform, and unlocking the boat, shoved it out into the stream.

Helen stood on the platform, in spite of the rain, very much interested in the working of the ferry.

"Isn't it a novel old boat?" she asked.

" 'Wynken, Blynken, and Nod one night
Sailed off in a wooden shoe—' "

Gil laughed. "But this isn't exactly 'a river of crystal light,' " he replied. "I imagine we might be compared more fittingly to our good father, Noah, after it had rained forty days and forty nights."

“I gather from that, that Elizabeth here—” he patted the Ford— “and I are intended to impersonate the animals,” Lane remarked dryly.

As he spoke the wire cable which connected the forward traveling sheave with the front pontoon of the boat pulled out of its fastenings and dropped into the stream. Instantly the big boat, held only by the rear sheave and cable, swung around with the pontoons broadside to the current. The strain on the single cable was more than doubled.

Gil sprang to the place where the rear cable was attached to the pontoon and grasped the cable, in order to lessen the strain on the bolted staple. As he did so, he saw that the nuts had been removed from the staple; and that only the fact that the boat had swung around, causing the pull to be from the side, instead of the top of the staple, was enabling the latter to hold. It might give away at any moment, setting them adrift on the river! To avoid the rapids would be practically impossible.

“Get a rope!—from the tool-box—quick!” he shouted to the ranger, as he put out all his strength to ease the strain on the cable. Lane snatched a rope from the tool-box on the running board of the Ford, and quickly tied it around the sill supporting the platform and through the loop in the cable.

With the detachment of the forward cable, the diagonal push of the current against the pontoons had been lost. The big boat had ceased to move shoreward. They were stranded in mid-river, with the entire force of the stream against the side of the pontoons. The upper

one was forced down almost to the water line by the tremendous weight against it. The muddy torrent roared angrily around the sides, as though anxious to tear the boat from its frail support.

As soon as Lane had tied the rear cable securely, Gil released his hold and snatched up the boat hook. After a few failures, he succeeded in catching the front cable, which was being swept down stream. He pulled it aboard and with Lane's help, forced the lower end of the boat around, so that the pontoons were once more diagonal to the course of the stream. They managed to hold it that way for a few moments, while the girl secured the end of the cable to a two-by-four, with a tire chain. She did her work well, following Lane's directions. They released their grasp on the cable. It held. The ferry had already resumed its shoreward motion.

For a moment the three stood without words. The strain had been too great readily to encourage casual speech. Then Lane heaved a huge sigh of relief.

"That was a close call," he said, "too close."

"Did you see those staples?" Gil asked.

"The nuts were removed from both."

They examined the rear staple, which was still in its place. Both nuts had been freshly removed.

"Reckon there isn't any doubt about who did it," the ranger said. "The trouble is, we haven't any proof. Our friends have started their little campaign, you see," he added to Gil.

"Who did it, Jim?" Helen asked. She was pale, Gil noted, but had not lost her presence of

mind, even when the danger was the greatest. "Some friends of ours," Lane replied, "who were having their little practical joke—practical from their viewpoint, at least. Fortunately, Gil caught that cable in time; and the joke didn't succeed; or we would be going over the rapids down there, just about now."

"Joke!" exclaimed Helen. "It was murder. Isn't there any way for them to be punished? Who could have done such a thing?"

"You can't convict without witnesses. Whoever did it naturally wouldn't want a lot of spectators around. The Chinaman who runs the ferry might have had a hand in it, but I doubt that."

"Well, here we are. Better lock this old scow, Hammond, and put a sign on her. Some fool homesteader might try to cross. Plain, every-day mud sure feels good, after that voyage, I'll say."

As they drove down the river Hammond's thoughts returned to their predicament on the ferry. As he re-pictured the scene, and the danger which it had involved, the countenance of Bill Meighan, with his mocking leer, arose before him. Helen was right. The thing had been virtually an attempt at murder—the cold-blooded sneaking kind. Gil did not doubt for a moment that Meighan had removed the staples. The fellow had heard Lane's conversation on the boat. That, itself would have suggested the idea to him. The Chinaman might have been an accomplice; more probably, Meighan had waited until Sam Wah had locked

the boat and gone to his lunch, before tampering with the staples.

As the ranger had said, there was no legal way of bringing Meighan to task. Personal opinions, based on circumstantial evidence, would not convict. But Gil did not want them to convict. He felt a strong desire to deal with Meighan, personally. Although he had never even spoken to the fellow, Hammond realized that he and Meighan were to be—were already—enemies. The man's conduct on the station platform also demanded a settlement. Although that had been between Meighan and the ranger, Gil found himself resenting the thing as much as if the insult had been to himself.

Hammond studied the girl's profile, as she talked to Lane, or watched the cliffs which could be seen now and then, through the vistas in the trees, to the right. Helen lost nothing of her charm during this close-up inspection. Gil noted the delicate modeling of her chin, the long curving line from its tip—the neck line, so dear to the heart of the magazine illustrator. It was a good line. Her mouth was pleasant—human, Gil thought. He disliked the excessive Cupid's bow effect in a girl's mouth, anyway. Helen's smile was a revelation.

And she had not screamed or fainted on the ferry, as many girls of his acquaintance would have done. Instead, she had been prompt to assist him and the ranger, when their united efforts could scarcely hold the boat. She had nerve; her excitement had been no greater than the ranger's and his own.

Hammond was surprised at his interest in the girl. In the station at Portland, despite his own

morbidity, he had instinctively responded to her joyous laugh and sparkling vitality; but he had expected never to see her again—had accepted her merely as a 'ship that had passed in the night,' and had shown a friendly beacon. Unconsciously, she had lighted the fog of his bitterness with a smile and a laugh. And now the 'ship that had passed in the night' had hove to, and was anchoring alongside.

His sister's and Dorothy Paige's lack of faith had served to embitter him against women in general, as well as against the rest of the world. The ranger's and his wife's friendliness had helped to alleviate this bitterness. Would this girl have faith in him, he wondered? Would her friendly smile change to one of cold hauteur and disdain, when she learned that he had been accused of being a thief?

Gil did not realize that his new environment of two weeks, with its new interests, had for the time being at least, wiped entirely from his mind the old environment of a lifetime. California, Dorothy Paige, Powell, his sister, Old Doc England—all were forgotten. In their place were the ranger and his family, Helen, and the Meighans.

Nor was Gil yet aware that the positions of relative importance in this last series were destined to undergo several interesting changes.

X

When they arrived at the station, and Mrs. Lane had greeted her sister, the ranger told his wife about the ferry misadventure. That lady expressed proper indignation.

"The contemptible sneaks!" she exclaimed. "Have you got to go through with all that again, Jim? You remember the things they did when we first came to the river. Isn't there some way to stop them, without a repetition of that feud of three years ago?"

"They have been trying to drive Jim from the river, ever since we came," she explained to Helen and Gil. "Now that the father and Bill are out of the penitentiary, they mean to start it all over again. And this time they won't stop at anything—even murder. What they tried to do today shows that. Can't you have them arrested, Jim?"

"Not without proof, my dear. Gil and I will just have to watch our step—and give them enough rope to hang themselves. It won't take them long, I feel sure. "Well, as Elijah said to the ravens: When do we eat?"

Mrs. Lane took Helen in charge, and the men were left to their own devices.

"The girls will be dolling themselves up for dinner—it will be 'dinner' tonight, in Helen's honor—so I reckon you and I might as well follow suit," Lane told Gil.

Hammond went to his room at the ranger station and changed his outdoor clothing for

the blue serge suit which Mrs. Lane had pressed for him the day before. He selected a necktie from the rack beside the bureau and knotted it carefully over a soft silk collar. After a few more finishing touches he surveyed himself in the mirror and decided that he was presentable. He found himself experiencing the same pleasure which any man feels, after changing from work-a-day clothes to the fresh, well-fitting, conventional garb.

When he returned to the bungalow he found Lane looking very neat and immaculate, in a loose-fitting gray suit, soft shirt, with a bow tie, and oxfords. Helen, dressed in a simple, though entirely charming housedress, with white pumps and stockings, was helping her sister lay the table. Jim-Jams had already departed to the realm of slumberland.

Lane seated his wife at the table, while Hammond held Helen's chair.

"Permit me, my dear," said the ranger. "Then, will you be kind enough to explain which of you fair ladies forgot to give me a knife and fork?"

He winked at Hammond. Both Mrs. Lane and her sister started to rise, but the ranger motioned them back.

"Why," said Helen, in astonishment, "I'm perfectly sure that I put them at your plate, Jim. What could have become of them? Are there spooks around?"

"I do not doubt your statement for a moment," returned the ranger. "Let all household spooks herewith consider themselves absolved. The mystery is solved by a simple exercise in deduction.

"You, my dear," turning to his wife, "seeing that you understand my methods, should already have found the answer, which lies at the door of our now slumbering offspring.

"Some time before you entered, sir," to Hammond, "I observed above-mentioned offspring vainly endeavoring to lift the piano. With that as a premise, it is merely a step to suppose that he might try to accomplish this stupendous feat with those same homely and—er—missing utensils as fulcrums and levers. I shall now attempt to prove my deduction, and you all may behold the result."

He went to the piano and returned with the missing knife and fork.

"You observe," he continued, as he secured fresh ones from the sideboard, "that the veracity of my deduction has been vindicated. You, my dear Helen, sit blameless before the world. This, my friends, is merely another example of the supremacy of mind. The—"

"Oh, hush, Jim, for the love of heaven!" laughed Mrs. Lane. "You are always harping on the way women chatter. A sewing circle, discussing the minister's new baby, couldn't hold a candle to you."

"But, my dear, suspicion hung over the fair name of your sister. Some—some, I maintain, would have accused her of an error of commission or of omission. I withheld judgment, relying on my powers of observation and deduction. The results which I have obtained have amply—"

"Your powers of reasoning and the results which you obtain are certainly marvelous," Helen interrupted. "If you are such a seer,

suppose you tell us just what Mr. Hammond is thinking about." She glanced at Gil who was smiling at the ranger's outburst.

"Oh, that's an easy one," chuckled Lane. "Our honest but—er—pugilistic young friend is pondering very deeply as to how a man of my age, family and—er—perspicacity can condescend to make such a fool of himself. Am I not right, Hammond?"

The young man laughed easily. "You win, Lane," he said. "You are undoubtedly a marvel. One might be led to suppose that you are telepathic, or that you work clairvoyantly."

"It isn't as bad as that. Still, I am something of a believer in both of those things. Have you ever had any personal experience with mediums?" asked the ranger.

"Nothing out of the ordinary, I suppose; if one may believe the current magazines and newspapers. I knew a man in the army who was either a medium or else one whale of a mind reader. It is all a mystery to me. Still, I believe the psychologists have made an effort to explain it all through the workings of the subconscious mind, whatever that is.

"What are your ideas on spiritualism, Miss Frasier?"

"I haven't any definite ones, I'm afraid," replied the girl. "I admire the work of investigation which some of the big men in the scientific field are doing. And, of course, I believe them to be honest in their attempts to prove survival after death. But I, myself, am anxious to see the things which they have seen, or believe themselves to have seen. It is something not to be accepted as a matter-of-course,

in the way we have been taught to believe the religious and political creeds of the past. I am anxious to have something reasonable and definite to believe; still, I am waiting to be shown, I suppose. It all seems too big and vital to be accepted on hearsay."

"Don't you think that it is just that desire for something definite which is largely responsible for the present wave of spiritualism?" asked Mrs. Lane.

"That, and the many bereavements of the recent war," replied her husband. "Of course, spiritualism has been an existing creed for many years; but the war has given it a new impetus. Thinking people, as you say, my dear, have begun to look for some creed which harmonizes with the teachings of modern science. Whether or not spiritualism does, is still a question. Personally, I am, as Helen says, waiting to be shown.

"By the way, Hammond, Mabel occasionally consents to tell fortunes; and she certainly possesses unusual powers at five-hundred and whist, if that may be taken as a recommendation. We'll have her read your dismal past, present and future for you, one of these days."

His past! Gil had forgotten that he had a past. The ranger's words brought it all back to him with shocking vividness.

"I would suggest that we hear Miss Frasier's first," he replied casually; but Lane, seeing Gil flush, realized his mistake, after it was too late, and shifted the conversation.

After they had finished the meal, Mrs. Lane suggested that they have some music, and they adjourned to the living room. Helen seated

herself at the piano and played a few selections which Mrs. Lane placed before her. The girl played well. She had a confident touch, and was sure of her music. Presently she opened her own music roll and taking out several popular songs, placed them on the piano.

"I suppose it is sacreligious to say so, but I like the popular songs best of all," she told Hammond who stood by the piano, turning her music. "I have even been accused of being addicted to jazz," she added with a smile.

"Don't you sing, Hammond?" asked the ranger. "It seems to me that I have heard you making sundry and melodious noises which might possibly indicate vocal accomplishment."

"Not much accomplishment," Gil answered as he looked over the music. "I sing a little."

He picked out a waltz-ballad which he had sung on several occasions in California. "I'll try this one, if Miss Frasier will help me," he told them.

Helen vamped a few measures of the accompaniment and he began. Gil had a rather well-trained baritone voice, and sang with confidence. He loved music. Helen joined him in the chorus with a soft mezzo-soprano obligato. The two voices blended well and the effect was pleasing. When they finished Lane and his wife applauded vigorously.

"That's good stuff," complimented the ranger. "That little oriole trill that Helen gets in goes great. And you hold forth quite manfully, Hammond. Try another."

"Thanks," Gil smiled. "I developed my voice yelling at old Mike and Dan. They require a high degree of excellence, I assure you."

Mike and Dan were the two work horses belonging to the station.

"Let's try this one," he suggested. "It has good harmony, and a place where you can get the trill-effect."

Helen glanced over the song. "I've never tried it," she told him. "It's one of the new ones I brought from the Coast. It looks easy, though."

She played a few measures softly, in order to get the swing.

"If you hold the G for three counts, and then the F sharp, the E and the F natural here, I'll take the upper notes," Gil told her, indicating a place in the chorus. "We may have to practise it a bit. Let's see what we can do with it."

The song was another waltz—"Honolulu Eyes." It was meaningless as to words, but the chorus was one of those plaintive, haunting melodies, suggestive of palm trees and wailing ukeleles. Gil sang the verse to a subdued accompaniment; Helen joined in the chorus with her softly trilling obligato. The Lanes were charmed with the duet, and insisted upon a repetition of it. As they repeated the chorus a second time, Hammond subdued the melody, and Helen trilled her obligato true and clear. The effect was bewitching. When they finished Hammond smiled at the girl and bowed with stage formality. She arose and dropped a courtesy.

"The opening performance appears to be a success," she laughed as the Lane's clamored for more. They sang another selection, and then the ranger and his wife joined them in several old songs.

"It certainly is a surprise to find such a good combination of talent up here on the river," Mrs. Lane told them. "There is going to be a community dance and social at the schoolhouse, next Saturday night. I am on the entertainment committee. You two can consider yourselves booked. The more numbers you have prepared, the better."

"That will be fun, don't you think?" asked Helen.

"It surely will," Gil assented. "I have a tenor banjo in the bottom of my trunk. We might work up some novelty stuff, to vary the program."

"That's just dandy!" Helen exclaimed. "Bring it over tomorrow. We'll play them some jazz!"

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When Gil finally crossed the road to his room in the ranger station, it was nearly midnight. He had a pleasant feeling of being at peace with the world, such as he had not experienced since leaving California. Somehow, his troubles seemed to have slipped away into a shadowy corner of his consciousness. The wrong which had been done him—Dorothy Paige—his sister—his fraternity brothers—did they really matter so much? Hadn't most of the pain come from his own morbid brooding bitterness?

And maybe the others hadn't been so much to blame, after all. He couldn't see their side of it. Even Powell—surely he must have had some excuse. The fellow had always been weak. Anyway, he, Gil, would stop brooding.

The world was still a mighty good place to live in. There were the Lanes—they were true blue—and Helen Frasier. Something told Hammond that she also would be true blue. And then there was Dr. England—Good Old Doc! After all it was people like these who made life worth the living. Why worry about the others?

And the evening had been one of the most enjoyable ones which he had ever spent.—Hammond closed the gate behind him and passed through the office to his room, softly humming “Honolulu Eyes.”

XI

Helen set the bucket down and hitched up the belt of her riding trousers. Glancing at her shadow on the ground, she decided that it must be almost noon. She placed the bucket on a flat rock and descending to the creek, bathed from her face and hands a little of the dust and berry stain with which they were liberally smudged.

The stream gurgled merrily down the gulch, stopping now and then to spread out in a deep shadow-lined pool, or to tumble over a heap of boulders, or the trunk of some ancient jack-pine which had fallen from the hill-side. Only the cool splashing of the water broke the silence. Helen turned to survey the hill-sides. No one was visible upon their gray pine-fringed slopes.

Seating herself on a large flat boulder which shelved out over a pool, she removed her ox-fords and stockings, and rolled up her laced trousers. How good the water felt on her dust-parched feet and ankles!

Helen realized that she was hungry. Stepping daintily over the rocks to where she had left the bucket, she brought it back to the pool, and with her feet hanging in the water, proceeded to dine. The bucket was filled with huckleberries, big juicy ones, the kind that grow only in western Montana and eastern Idaho.

Over at the far side of the pool a little swarm of gnats were circling crazily over its surface. Presently a flashing silvery body shot up from

the depths and disappeared beneath the surface of the pool with a splash which sent the wavelets rolling shoreward. The trout were dining too, she thought with a little smile, as she drew her feet from the water.

She sat, hands clasped over her knees, her lips pursed wistfully as she softly whistled a tune and gazed into the green-black shadows of the pool. A boyishly trim little figure she was, there on the rock. The girl was clad in riding trousers, a soft green blouse, open at the collar, revealing in a most alluring manner the firmness and delicate lines of her neck and throat. A boy's green cap, pulled over her gold-brown hair, protected her face from the rays of the sun.

Fanciful pictures of nymphs, dryads and satyrs began to form themselves from the wreathing sun-kissed bubbles at the upper edge of the pool; and as she watched the little half-globes form and go floating across its flickering surface, to be sucked in and engulfed by the small whirlpool at its lower extremity, her sun-touched features relaxed into a half-smile.

That morning, after Mrs. Lane had left with Jim-Jams to visit one of the neighbors, Helen had donned her hiking clothes and gone berry-picking. The novelty of being alone in the hills appealed to her imagination. She reveled in the wealth of material which these lonely, rock-ribbed and pine-studded hills furnished for her fancies.

Presently an inquisitive mosquito that had been hovering in the vicinity decided that her white blue-veined ankles would be an admirable

field for activity, and Helen was awakened somewhat rudely from her reverie.

"Oh, you hateful thing!" she said as she brushed the insect away and picked up her shoes and stockings. Drawing on one stocking, she laced the neat though dusty oxford, while she wriggled the toes of her other foot in the cooling water. She turned to reach for the other stocking. It was not there. She looked about somewhat impatiently. The garment was nowhere to be seen. Then, gazing down into the pool, she caught sight of the missing stocking, some three feet below the surface, slowly sinking as it became saturated, to the bottom of the pool.

"Oh, bother! Darn!" she exclaimed as she laced the other trousers' leg. Helen had worn the stockings after the fashion of golfers, over the laced trousers, with a roll below the knee. The missing garment left revealed a rather conspicuous portion of white ankle between the trousers bottom and the oxford. With a little grimace of reconciliation she began lacing the other shoe.

A rock came tumbling down the shale slide which ended on the opposite side of the creek. Helen looked up with a start. A man was carefully picking his way around the upper edge of the slide, some two hundred feet above her. She could hear the scrape of his hob-nailed boots on the rocks.

She saw the man was Hammond. He carried a rigged fishing pole in his hand, and had a basket slung over his shoulder. He cleared the upper edge of the slide and started down the hill. She hurriedly laced the oxford. Gil stopped at the opposite side of the pool.

"Hello!" he called, "trying to locate the Submarine?"

"The Submarine?" mystified. "I didn't know that submarines were fresh-water animals."

"This one is. Haven't you heard about him?"

Helen denied any knowledge of the Submarine. "Tell me about him," she said. "Is he a spirit, or a joke?"

"Neither; he's a fish, the Grand Bolshevik, patriarch and rabbi of all the finny brethren in these parts. The homesteaders call him the Submarine. He has never been successfully hooked; and thereby hang many tales. Reports say that this old boy was at one time private secretary to Jonah's whale."

"Goodness! What a wealth of historical data he must have collected throughout the years! I should think you would try to cultivate his acquaintance."

"Oh, I've made several advances; so has every one else in the neighborhood; but this old-timer is a snob. He doesn't appreciate the value of our friendly solicitude, as Lane would say. He's a grouch."

"Oh, he probably misses his master, the whale. What were you doing up on the rocks—prospecting for flying fish?"

He laughed. "No; merely taking the longest and sweetest way around that patch of briars below the slide."

"Were you going to the station? If so, I'll play Jack to your Jill, and carry the bucket."

Helen was going to the station. "Tell me some more about the Submarine," she said as

they wound their way up the narrow fisherman's path by the creek.

"Flathead Joe—he's the old Indian who does the chores, you know—says that His Fishship is mighty bad medicine—claims that he is the returned spirit of an Indian princess. Personally, I think that as a princess, she must have been a vamp."

"Yes, Sac-a-ge-wia, possibly. But she wasn't a vamp, that I remember. He might be Cleopatra, or Salome, or Helen of Troy. 'Vamp' would be a much better name than 'Submarine,' don't you think? If he could be caught and domesticated, the Vamp would probably make some one a fortune in the movies."

"That would be a pity. I have always hated domesticated fish. Let's just leave him a submarine, or a vamp."

"By the way, why don't you try your hand at scraping an acquaintance with His Vamps? Might counter-vamp him, you know," he grinned.

"That would be exciting, wouldn't it? But I'm afraid my efforts wouldn't receive the overwhelming success which they would deserve. I'm not very experienced as a fisherman—or as a vamp," with a twinkle.

"Could learn both, I imagine. Jim can give you some mighty good pointers—about fishing, not vamping. I'll teach you to cast myself, if you wish. You'd like it. Suppose we have a little tournament, the two of us. We could make a wager for the other to pay the one who succeeds in beguiling His Vamps."

"That would be fun. What would you suggest for a wager?"

"We can arrange that later. When I come over to practise our act for Saturday, this evening, I'll give you some casting lessons, out in the front yard."

When they arrived at the ranger station, Hammond left the girl at the front of the bungalow and went around to the rear, where he placed the trout on ice, in the refrigerator. He had cleaned the fish at the creek.

Mrs. Lane met Helen at the door. At the sight of the girl's stockingless ankle the older woman burst out laughing.

"Helen Frasier," she exclaimed, "where is your stocking?"

"Oh, my goodness! I lost it down in the creek," Helen laughed. "And to think that I talked 'fishes' for almost an hour, with that blessed man, and I absolutely stockingless!"

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"Who and what is Mr. Hammond?" the girl asked her sister, later in the afternoon.

"He's the assistant ranger; that's all we know about him," Mrs. Lane replied. "He seems to be a very fine young man. Jim swears by him; but he hinted that there was some mystery connected with Mr. Hammond. However that may be, I cannot but feel that the young man is all right. You two seem to be getting on famously."

"Oh, he's quite fascinating," Helen replied, smiling at her sister.

But the girl was thinking of the owner of a big maroon football sweater, with its silver M, and gold service stripes, which lay in the bot-

tom of her trunk. Like every college girl who is possessed of a certain degree of beauty and charm, Helen had had her innumerable small love affairs. She had taken none of them seriously, had accepted them as something that went with college life. Some of them had terminated with vacation. Others had simply worn themselves out; and one had terminated through mutual agreement.

Helen was not a flirt, by any means; but the prevailing fashions in school had run to such small affairs. All had been more or less pleasant—the boys were fine, irresponsible fellows. It had been give and take. Her conscience did not trouble her over any of them.

With big “Sandy” Dinwiddie, the owner of the football sweater, matters had been different. Helen was not in love with Sandy, and had told him so with the same frankness she had used when other affairs had approached a more or less critical stage. But the big, good-humored Scotchman had practically worshipped the girl since he, as a raw-boned freshman, had watched her lead her sorority basketball team to a university championship.

Helen was then a sophomore in the University of Montana, at Missoula. It was not until his junior and her senior year that Sandy had gained courage enough to make advances. The big, bashful football star had taken her to the athletic ball; and thereafter they were together as often as Helen’s work in the domestic science laboratory and Sandy’s forestry studies would permit.

Sometimes they took long walks up the long crooked trail which wound around the side of

Mount Sentinel, shadowing the little university. Occasionally they went on outing parties, sometimes to a promising motion picture or road show. They were invariably together at all university dances and similar affairs.

Helen liked and admired the big Scotchman; but there were many little things which she considered vital in her own scheme of life, that Sandy could not make head or tail of. It was during their long walks together that the girl first became conscious of this. In her eager enthusiasm, she would pour out to the big fellow her many ideals and plans of life. They were vital to Helen, but to Sandy they were simply Greek. He would sit at her feet in rapt attentiveness, watching the play of expressions on her features; but when the girl would ask him for an opinion, or confirmation of some of her own, Sandy would flush and stammer; and Helen would know that he had not listened to a word she had uttered.

To Sandy, life was not a thing of airy day-dreams and visions; it was a simple, obvious fact. While he pondered for hours over Helen's vagaries, he could make nothing of them. Girls were different, he decided, and let it go at that. He continued to worship Helen with a dog-like faithfulness; and the girl, although she did not realize it, would have been better pleased with him had he shown a little more spirit. His meekness was not in keeping with his size and athletic prowess.

The week before her graduation in June, Sandy had managed to collect sufficient courage to beg her to take his fraternity pin, and wait for him until he had graduated and made a

start in his profession; but Helen would not agree to this. But she finally consented to take his latest football sweater, which Sandy had had the coach order three sizes too small, so that it would fit her. Helen wore it around the campus during the evenings until it had to be discarded for the conventional cap and gown of commencement week.

Since leaving the university, Helen had given considerable thought to Sandy, and to life in general. While she prided herself on being self-supporting, the girl did not expect to make teaching a life-work. Eventually, she knew that she would marry. To her, marriage seemed the proper fulfilment of life.

But Helen was not in a hurry. She had ideals, and had dreamed dreams. Whimsically, she told herself that she was waiting for the Prince. As much as she liked and admired Sandy, the girl knew that he could never qualify in that rôle. A big, good-natured Hercules, yes; but not the Prince—Her Prince, as she had created him in her fancies.

About Hammond the girl had not yet analyzed her feelings. He was unmistakably a man of refinement. Although quiet and reserved, he was sure of himself; and he was not dull. Helen had watched his face light up with interest and appreciation during serious moments in their conversation. When he spoke his words had been few and to the point. She liked the slow, humorous smile which crinkled the corners of his mouth when Lane touched up his conversation with a subtle bit of drollery, and the twinkle which came into his eyes as he watched Jim-Jams during one of the young-

ster's rampages. When Gil's features were in repose, there was a cold seriousness about them which Helen could not understand. When he smiled he looked like a big boy.

Down at the pool that morning, for the first time since she had been on the River, Hammond had cast aside his reserve, and had jested with her about the Submarine, in the free and easy repartee of the campus. Many of his remarks had been whimsically imaginative—some of them ridiculous in their absurdity. Helen had a notion that he would understand many of the things which Sandy had failed to grasp.

Her sister had said that there was a mystery about Hammond—that they knew nothing of his past, except that he had come from California. During one of their conversations, he had told her of some of his experiences in France; but had never mentioned friends or relatives. He had made no mention of his home or school, although he bore all the markings of a university man.

Yes, there must be some mystery about him, the girl decided, and unconsciously her interest in Hammond increased. He was certainly very likable—could he be the Prince? Helen wondered—.

XII

As Hammond sat gazing out over the valley, from the office of the ranger station, he caught the loud chug-chug of a heavily loaded motor. Presently he saw several trucks, piled high with timbers and machinery, turn out of the main road and enter a field at the lower border of the Knutson ranch. They moved slowly across the field and stopped near the other side of the valley, where the men began unloading near the edge of the woods which came down from the hillside. So there was where they were going to drill the proposed oil well, Gil thought as he watched the men finish unloading and depart once more for Noxon.

Well, that meant that Harrison Christy would be on the scene in a few days, Hammond told himself as he picked up his ruling pen and resumed work on the tracing which was tacked to the drawing-board in front of him. Let Christy come; if the man told what he knew, well and good. Gil was not afraid that his tale would make any difference with the Lanes. And Helen—while he felt that the girl would believe in him, the young man's experience with Dorothy Paige made him doubtful of every girl. If Helen belonged to the class of fair-weather friends he wanted to know it. Gil was surprised to find himself anxious for an opportunity to prove the girl's loyalty.

He made a mental comparison of the two girls. Both were well-bred and attractive.

Dorothy was beautiful, with all the perfect assurance and graces that go with conscious beauty. Helen's charm, on the other hand, lay not so much in actual perfection of features as in her buoyancy of spirit and sparkling vitality. Her smiles and pretty mannerisms were as natural as those of an impulsive child. Both girls were quick-witted; Helen was chummy and sympathetic; Dorothy, dignified and reserved. Helen could be a comrade—a pal. Dorothy would always be the Perfect Lady.

As Hammond bent over his drawing-board he heard a step outside and turning his head, he found Helen standing in the doorway.

"Hello," she smiled mischievously. "Why the haunting expression of sad and meditative wistfulness?"

"Oh, I was just thinking," he replied.

"That was obvious. She must have been a radiant, bewitching princess, from Never-Never-Land, from your expression."

"Was it that bad?" he laughed. "No; she wasn't a princess. I thought her to be, at one time; but I found that she was merely a girl."

"Tell me about your Princess-who-was-merely-a-girl. She sounds interesting. Maybe she'll turn out to be a princess after all, and you'll live happy ever after."

"Not a chance in the world. A princess who turned out to be merely a girl is rather a difficult subject. I'm afraid I couldn't do her justice today. Suppose you tell me about the Prince, instead."

"Oh, the Prince has always remained a prince. There have been several pretenders,

however. I'm afraid I couldn't do *him* justice today, either.

"I have an idea! Suppose we have that for our wager about the Submarine. If you catch him I'll tell about the Prince, and if I catch him you tell about the Princess."

"That would be fair enough," he returned with a grin. "Only, if you catch him you'll have to tell about the Prince anyway."

"Why, pray?"

"Well, you are my understudy as a fisherman, aren't you?"

Helen laughed. "I'm afraid that would be what Flathead Joe calls 'bad medicine,' " she told him. "Leave out that latter clause and we'll call it a bet. Something tells me that I shall win."

She held out some letters. "I came over to ask you if you would give these letters to any one passing, who happens to be going to town," she explained.

Hammond promised to see that her letters reached the postoffice, and the girl returned to the bungalow.

Helen, like most people, was possessed of a considerable share of the inquisitive instinct. Hammond's reticence in regard to himself and his past aroused her curiosity. The girl vaguely recalled seeing his picture somewhere. She thought that it must have been in some university annual, but was not sure. Her sister had said that he came from California.

Before leaving Missoula, Helen had received a copy of the University of California year-book, from a friend attending that school. Possibly she had seen his picture in the California

annual. The morning previous to the above conversation, she had written the house-keeper of her sorority house, where she had left most of her belongings, for the book.

Helen had no near relatives, except her sister and the aunt living in Portland. For the coming year she was to teach domestic science in Missoula High School. She had planned, of course, to continue to live at her sorority house while in Missoula.

The following evening was the one scheduled for the community dance at which Helen and Gil were to sing.

"It will be entirely informal," Mrs. Lane had laughingly replied to the girl's query as to what she should wear. Helen chose a simple white dress, with a touch of blue at the collar and belt, and mischievous little white pumps, with white stockings.

Hammond gave her a look of approval when he came over, and held out a large bunch of swamp violets.

"The florist hasn't invaded this section yet," he told her, "but I noticed these down by the creek this evening and brought 'em along. Beauties, aren't they?"

"Thanks! They're splendid!" She smiled as she pinned them to her belt. "A florist would be superfluous where violets like these grow alone, don't you think?"

"Yes; an absurdity. Here comes Joe Davis and his Buick, our transportation agency," he told her. "Elizabeth is again indisposed to-night."

"What is he?" asked Helen as she looked at Joe and the big battered car, "a taxi man?"

“No; a deputy sheriff and public spirited citizen. Joe owns the only big car in the neighborhood; so he takes it upon himself to haul every one who hasn’t a way to go, to the community dances and other social functions. He will probably make a dozen trips tonight, all of ’em gratis. Joe considers it his privilege, Jim says, and would be highly insulted were any one to offer him pay.”

Lane and his wife came out and they climbed into the battered old machine.

“Gotta run up after the Mortons,” Davis said as he backed into the road.

“Yes; and after the Hamptons, and the Larsons, and Tommy Knutson’s girl, and Coyote Bill Moore,” Gil told the girl. “We’ll be about twenty strong when we get to the school house—if this old boat will hold that many.”

They finally arrived, with the car packed to the fenders.

“All out, ladies and gentlemen, for the Grand Beaver River Weekly Shindig!” called Davis. “Mr. Willie Minkler will show you around the conservatory while I make one more voyage in ‘The Golden West,’ and then we’ll let the festivities begin!”

“Festivities” was a good name for it. From the moment when the orchestra—consisting of a fiddle, accordion and piano—burst into the first rollicking one-step, the little schoolhouse was a veritable frolic. How those people danced—or tried to dance!

As Helen and Gil swung into step she glanced over his shoulder at the other couples. Mothers were dancing with big sons, daughters with little brothers, big sisters with sweethearts,

fathers with their neighbors' wives; and upon every face was an expression of honest good feeling and well-being.

"No one will attempt to keep a program," Gil told the girl—the Lanes had taken him the previous Saturday night. "Every one knows every one else," he added, "and just asks her to dance. They will all know you, whether you have been introduced or not. You are 'The Ranger's Wife's Sister,' you see."

But Helen noted that Gil was careful to see that almost every one was properly introduced. He was perfectly at ease, she also observed; and omitted no courtesy that would have been proper on a ballroom floor; yet there was not the slightest hint of formality in his bearing.

When young Bob Larsen claimed her for the next waltz, Helen saw Gil looking around for a partner. Mrs. Beraneck, a short, motherly little woman of fifty, was seated alone at the other side of the hall. Hammond skipped across the floor and swung her away to the strains of "My Wild Irish Rose." Helen noted the broad grin on his bronzed features as he chatted to the little woman, whose radiant up-turned face came considerably below the level of his shoulders.

At the end of the dance Joe Davis stepped to the center of the floor.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began, as he mopped the perspiration from his forehead, "When the Lord made Adam and Eve back in the Garden of Eden he done a mighty good job; but I've never seen no record that shows as to how Adam had a coat on. So gents, I'm takin'

mine off, to dance in comfort. The rest of you can do as you darn please!"

A roar of applause and laughter greeted this oration, and most of the men began to peel their coats. Helen noted that Gil still wore his, when he came to ask her for the next dance.

"Why don't you take your coat off?" she suggested. "Fashion has sanctioned it, you know."

"Thanks for the suggestion," he smiled. "Believe I will."

Davis again climbed a chair and shouted, "Ladies and gentlemen! Choose your partners for a Virginia reel!" The orchestra struck up the time-worn melody, "Leather Breeches."

"Hey, there, you two!" Davis cried as he spied Hammond and the girl at the other end of the room. "No dances set out until after midnight. Get in line. We need your smiling faces."

And the two laughingly took their places at the end of the line.

Every one danced this number; it was one of the features of the evening. When the orchestra finally stopped from sheer exhaustion, Gil led Helen to a seat near the door.

"Wow!" he grinned. "That was hot work. Let me get you some punch. Bill Finnigan hinted that it might have a kick in it."

He returned a few moments later with two glasses. "False alarm about the kick," he told her. "Mrs. Gunter helped to make this punch. She's a Methodist. It's merely punch, without the punch; but it's cold."

Helen glanced across the hall to a group who were holding hi-jinx around the punch bowl. In

the midst of the merry-makers were the ranger and his wife.

"Have you noticed how they all seem to be enjoying themselves tonight?" she asked. "Mabel hasn't laughed so much for days, and Jim is gamboling about like a young colt."

"Yes, every one is having the time of his life," Gil said. "You see, these weekly dances are the only occasions that people up here have for getting together and just relaxing and having a good time. It isn't like living in town, where you can see your friends and neighbors every day, and can drop in on them at a moment's notice. Some of these people have come twenty miles tonight. There isn't even a motion picture house this side of Noxon. Folks aren't surfeited with pleasures up here. That's why they can play with such abandon."

"It's good to see them play," said Helen.

Mrs. Lane came over just then.

"We have decided to split up your act," she told them, "and have you play for the next dance, if you don't mind. The orchestra is simply tired to death, after that Virginia reel. Would you mind playing a fox-trot?"

They would not mind. Helen seated herself at the piano and Hammond took the chair vacated by the accordion player. He selected a fox-trot which they had practised several times, and they began to play. Helen hammered the piano with a firm steady touch, with Gil twanging a melody on his banjo. He varied the chorus with a bewildering array of runs and jazz strokes. The dancers were delighted. Many of them ceased to dance, preferring to stand around the piano and watch the musicians.

When they had finished every one applauded wildly and called for an encore. Jazz, other than the phonograph variety, had not yet made its appearance on Beaver River. Hammond grinned at Helen as he turned the page back to the beginning, and they played the selection twice more. The dancers continued to clap their hands and call for encores.

“Might as well give them another, don’t you think?” Gil asked as he selected a waltz. Helen smiled an assent. When they came to the chorus Helen whistled the melody and Gil tremoloed an obligato on his banjo. On the second chorus he played the melody and the girl hummed the second part. They had to play it over and over again.

When they were finally allowed to stop, Mrs. Lane, seeing that the psychological moment had arrived, asked them to sing their duet. Helen played the introduction and they sang “Honolulu Eyes.”

To any lover of simple melody and harmony their singing would have been pleasing. The people of Beaver River knew no other kind of music. Their audience was enraptured, and so expressed themselves.

“Caruso and Galli-Curci never had a thing on us, tonight,” Gil told Helen, with another grin, as he opened the music for their third encore.

Finally Joe Davis mounted a chair and pounded heavily on top of the piano.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he said. “I think that we all agree to and coincide with the statement that the music has been *some* entertainin’ an’ elegant. (Applause.) But, ladies and gen-

tlements," he went on, "seein' as how these young people have been singin' and playin', amid violent intermissions, for the last three quarters of an hour, I'd like to suggest that we give 'em a chance to rest up a bit—hopin' to hear some more of that same brand later in the evenin'."

Every one crowded around the piano, expressing appreciation of the music. Their words of praise were so warm and sincere that Hammond found himself flushing to the roots of his hair.

"It certainly made a hit with them," he told Helen, after the regular orchestra had started a fox-trot. "I'm actually beginning to feel important," he added with a smile.

"Yes, I noticed that," the girl replied, with a mischievous twinkle. "Why did you blush so?"

Gil blushed again. "Did I?" he asked. "Blushing is one of my natural failings, I suppose. Anyway, these people are the best ever; don't you think so?"

"They certainly are. I don't think that I ever enjoyed singing and playing so much as I did tonight."

"Same here," he replied earnestly.

It was already past midnight. After the next dance refreshments were served. These were followed by several "stunts" which the entertainment committee had provided.

Joe Davis recited a monologue, which produced roars of laughter; Mrs. Lane gave a comic reading, and Shorty O'Neill did a clog dance, liberally accentuated with handsprings. After the others had finished there was a general clamor

for Gil and Helen, who once more sang and played.

During the refreshments Hammond had noticed, Bill Meighan and his brother, Cliff together with several other late arrivals, standing near the door. All through the entertainment the newcomers had been unnecessarily boistrous and noisy. Several of their loud remarks had drawn scowling glances from Joe Davis and others who had heard them. The newcomers were evidently drinking rather heavily.

When the dance was once more resumed, Hammond, who had asked Mrs. Davis for this one, he and Helen having already played the after-supper dance, saw Bill Meighan cross the room rather unsteadily to where Helen stood talking with her partner for the dance, Joe Collingan, a boy about fifteen years of age.

"I want this dance, sister," Meighan said, with a leering smile. Helen turned and looked at him for a moment.

"I have the dance, thank you," she replied coldly.

An expression of rage swept the smile from Meighan's features. "Have it with our friend, Little Boy Blue here, who gurgles so sweetly, I reckon?" he asked insolently, indicating Hammond, who had excused himself from his partner and was approaching them.

"That will do, Meighan," Gil said quietly. "Miss Frasier has just said that she has this dance. That ought to be enough."

"It ought, hey? Well, where does mamma's boy get in on this, anyway?"

Meighan was just drunk enough to be dan-

gerous. His right hand slipped into the bosom of his flannel shirt—he was again in cowboy costume. With his left hand he reached over and slapped Hammond in the face. Gil's right hand shot out and caught him on the point of the chin. As he fell Meighan jerked a pistol from a holster under his shirt and fired point-blank. The bullet whizzed past Hammond's head and buried itself in the ceiling.

In an instant the little schoolhouse was an uproar of screaming women and shouting men. Before Meighan could fire a second time Joe Colligan kicked the pistol from his hand. Hammond, with a dozen others were on the fellow in a moment and were taking him toward the door.

Joe Davis, who was a deputy sheriff, pushed his way through the throng. "Let me have him, fellows," he said. "He's due for another lock-up for this."

Meighan burst into a torrent of oaths and abuse.

"Shut up!" snapped Davis. He grasped the man by the arm and hustled him to the door.

Cliff Meighan and one or two of his companions who had stood by the door, had started forward during the affair with their hands thrust in their pockets in a threatening manner. Now they crowded out, blocking the door so that Davis and his prisoner left the room before any of the others were out.

As the deputy pushed Bill Meighan out into the night Cliff Meighan's fist shot out, and Davis sprawled backward in the doorway. Before any one could stop them, the Meighans had

sprung on their horses and were clattering away up the the road.

Davis cursed low and deeply as he brushed the dust from his clothes. "People," he said to the excited crowd outside the doorway, "one thing is certain; this River ain't goin' to be no fit place to live on until that bunch has been cleaned out. And believe me, they're goin' to be cleaned. Let's go back to our dancin'. No need to let 'em say that they busted up our party. Tomorrow I'll go after 'em, and if they're there, I'll get 'em."

When Meighan had pulled his gun and fired, Helen had screamed and covered her face. She now stood with her sister, whose arm was about the girl. Several of the other women were quite hysterical; one had fainted. The men still formed an excited hostile group around the door. Some were for taking a posse and going at once for the Meighans.

Lane, who had been at the opposite side of the hall when the trouble began, walked to the center of the floor and pounded for silence with a broomstick.

"Folks," he said, "what Davis said outside the door a few minutes ago is the best thing we can do just now. That is, go ahead with the dance. What has happened has happened. It is over with. It would do no good to send a posse after the Meighans, for the simple reason that no one would know where to find them.

"No one has been hurt; no one is the worse off, except Bill and Cliff Meighan. Both have made themselves liable to prison terms. Davis will either get them, or they will have to leave the country.

“As Joe said just now, let’s go ahead with our dance, and not give the Meighans the satisfaction of breaking up our party.”

The orchestra followed his suggestion by beginning a one-step, and the ranger led his wife out on the floor. A few other couples joined them and the dance was resumed.

“Shall we dance?” Hammond asked Helen. “It seems the only sensible thing to do, just now.”

The girl gave him a little smile of assent. Joe Davis and his wife also joined the others on the floor. The hall was soon filled with dancers, but the spirit of care-free revelry was gone.

Although Gil was perfectly cool, as he had been the entire evening, his face showed signs of his encounter with the Meighans. His lips were tightly pressed, and there was a steely glint in his eyes. It had been the speed and promptness of Gil’s leap to one side, as Meighan drew his gun, which had kept the latter from finding his target.

“Let’s sit down,” Helen told him, at the beginning of the encore. “I’d like to talk, if you don’t mind.” Gil led her to a seat near the door.

“There isn’t any way for me to tell you just how sorry I am that this thing happened to-night,” she said. “If you—or some one else had been killed, it would have been—terrible. I suppose I should have danced with him—”

“That’s ridiculous, of course. And you’re not the least little bit to blame. The thing was bound to happen—if not then, it would have come later. It was something that started be-

fore you, or I, for that matter, came to the River. Let's just forget it, and remember the pleasant part of the evening."

"And I suppose you aren't going to let me thank you for what you did, Gil," she replied earnestly. "I want you to know that I appreciate it, anyway."

"There isn't any reason for thanks," he returned, with a little flush of pleasure at her use of his first name. "I—I think that you were the best little sport in the world, tonight, Helen."

"Why?"

"Oh, just mixing with folks the way you did."

"Well—so were you!" the girl returned with a smile.

XIII

After Hammond had bade Mrs. Lane and Helen good-night, at the door of the bungalow, the ranger, who had been waiting for a few words alone with the young man, spoke quietly.

"The outlook, so far as the Meighans are concerned, isn't especially brilliant, Gil," he said. "Tonight's affair has made both the boys subject to arrest, and I don't think for a moment that they will be arrested. Instead, they will hide out in the woods, up Lightning Creek and around Beaver Lake. Davis hasn't a chance in the world of catching them, unless they come and give themselves up, or make a fight. They won't do either.

"You've got to be careful—we both have to be, for that matter. Don't leave your shade up, with a light burning, after night; and don't leave your doors unlocked. They may be useless precautions, but knowing the Meighans as I do, I believe them to be necessary ones. Also, don't leave the station without a gun. Cliff and Old Man Meighan have it in for you over our scrap down the road, and Bill will try to get even for tonight's affair. What he did at the ferry shows that he wouldn't stop at murder, if he had the chance to get away with it.

"Another thing; the woods are pretty dry. That means fires. We're going to have to watch our step."

"I think you're right," the young man replied. "Bill is the sneaking, bravado, desperado

type. I'm not afraid of him in the open, but I don't mean to be caught napping if I can help it—

“What's that?”

The snort of a horse came from the roadway. Both men turned and peered into the darkness. Suddenly, there came a flash, and the sharp crack of a rifle broke the stillness of the night. Gil heard a dull thud beside him, and turned just in time to catch the ranger, who stumbled back into the doorway. As he eased Lane to the floor Hammond heard the muffled staccato of a horse's hoofs on the dusty road.

The ranger sat up. “It's all right,” he said, “just a scratch in the shoulder, I think. No need to alarm the girls.” Gil helped him to his feet as Helen and her sister came out.

“What's the matter, Jim? What was that shot, outside?” Mrs. Lane asked anxiously.

“Nothing is the matter, my dear. Some one took a shot at Gil, just now. I got a little scratch in the shoulder; that's all. Nothing to worry about in the least.”

The two women stood for a moment, pale and transfixed with horror. Lane burst out laughing.

“Suffering Pete!” he grinned. “You two look like a couple of plaster tragediennes. I thought better of you, Mabel. And you too, Helen. Run to the bathroom, one of you, and get a strip of court-plaster. Gil will fix me up in a minute.”

Helen ran to the kitchen for warm water and Mrs. Lane went to the bathroom for bandages and iodine. Gil helped the ranger remove his coat, baring his left shoulder. The wound was

a clean bullet hole, through the muscular part of the shoulder. Gil heaved a sigh of relief as he saw that it was not serious.

"Better go tell them that it is only a scratch, and let Mabel fix me up," Lane told him. "Both of 'em are pretty much overwrought. Tonight's excitement has been somewhat intense and prolonged for persons of our simple pastoral habits," he added.

Gil took the pan of water from Helen and placed it on a chair beside the ranger; then he led the girl back to the dining-room.

"Is it very bad?" she asked. The girl's voice was calm, but Gil could not help noticing the heightened pallor of her features.

"No; it's not at all serious," he told her. "Just a slight flesh wound. Jim will be as good as new in a week. It certainly is a pity to have your visit to the River spoiled this way," he went on.

"My visit doesn't matter in the least," she replied. "I'm not a mere infant, you know; although I'll admit that I have acted like one tonight. But it *was* rather sudden and bewildering. If this sort of thing is going to continue, I'm glad to be here with Mabel."

Lane and his wife appeared in the doorway. Save for his left arm in a sling, he did not seem to be any the worse for the incident. As a result of her husband's chaffing, plus the assurance that he was not seriously injured, Mrs. Lane was once more smiling, though rather wanly.

"Let the festive board be cleared for an agreeable and timely session of communion, relaxation, and refreshment," Lane said, making

a sweeping gesture with his uninjured arm. "Mabel has just promised that we may strengthen our spirits, and incidentally break our fast on coffee and angel-food cake. What say you, Fair Mistress, yeleft for Her of Troy? Would you condescend to such mundane pleasures of the merely mortal?"

"Thrice noble and illustrious James Ulysses, your tidings are both pleasant and timely," Helen returned. And the near-tragedy, while not forgotten, was for the time being, thrust into the background.

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Lane's prediction in regard to the Meighans proved true. When Davis, with another deputy, called at the Meighan ranch early the next morning, Old Man Meighan met them with a surly greeting.

"Hain't seen either of the boys since yesterday evenin'," he replied in answer to Davis' query. "If you want to look for 'em, go to it. But you won't find 'em."

His prediction proved correct. Nothing which might indicate the presence of either of the Meighan boys was to be found about the ranch.

"Let me give you a tip that might save you some worry," said the old man with a sneer. "Them boys have lit out for parts unknown. When they come back you'll hear from 'em."

Davis laughed at the thinly veiled threat. "When they come back, you can tell 'em that I have a warrant for the two of 'em," he retorted. "An' you might add that I ain't loosin' no chance to serve it."

“You sho’ are some hell of a little deputy sheriff!” Meighan mocked, as the officers turned their horses and rode away down the valley.

Davis did not believe for a moment that the Meighans had left the country, as their father had stated. That had merely been a pretense at a bluff. The two were probably hiding out somewhere, waiting for the thing to blow over, or waiting for a chance to settle their score with the ranger and Hammond. It would be useless to collect a posse and try to hunt them down, for Davis had, as yet, no definite idea of their whereabouts. While every one was normally certain that one of them had fired the shot which had wounded the ranger, still there was no actual proof of the fact. The deputy concluded that the best thing for him to do was to keep his eyes open and bide his time.

The ranger experienced no serious difficulty from his wound. Dr. Miller, who had been summoned from Noxon to re-bandage and dress the wound, stated that it was in no way serious. Hammond had no trouble in carrying on the routine office work alone. Fortunately, a heavy shower of a few hours’ duration settled the question of forest fires for several days to come.

Helen’s copy of the California annual arrived on Monday, following the dance at the school-house. The girl found that her memory had not proved her false. Gil’s picture, together with the usual list of organizations, events and honors which he had participated in while at California, she found with the senior class group.

So he had been a senior, and had not grad-

uated! She had left Missoula immediately after the University of Montana Commencement. She had spent several days on the Coast before coming to the River. Her sister had said that Gil had been at the ranger station eight or ten days when she arrived. Why, he must have left California about the same time she left Missoula. That would have been little more than a week before the date for the Berkeley Commencement. Surely he couldn't have missed Graduation Week for the sake of taking a job with the Forest Service! No; he had evidently left school—had not graduated. It could not have been that he was down in his studies, for he was listed as an honor student. The girl was mystified.

She glanced through the book and found Gil's name occurred rather frequently. And yet he had never spoken of his life at the University, or even hinted that he had attended that institution. That wasn't natural. A man talked of his university—was proud of it. Some could talk of nothing else. Why was Hammond so reticent?

Helen did not believe that anything dishonorable on Gil's part had been the reason. He was frank about everything except his past, manly, as straightforward as Lane himself. Yet, at times the young man was just a little ironical, even cynical. Helen felt that this, together with his secretiveness, had something to do with the reason for his leaving California.

Work on the derrick which was being built at the far side of the Knutson field progressed rapidly. Before the end of the week sheds had

been built and the derrick itself was beginning to lift its braced and bolted spire into the sky.

Hammond's surmise in regard to Harrison Christy proved correct. One morning a dusty car drew up in front of the station, and as Gil glanced up from his drawing, he saw Christy standing in the doorway.

"Why, hello, Hammond!" said the engineer, advancing with outstretched hand. "Didn't expect to see you up here in this neck of the woods."

Gil shook hands with Christy and offered him a chair.

"How's the oil business?" he inquired casually.

"Pretty good prospects. Nothing definite, of course, until a test well has been drilled. We are rushing the construction work through as fast as possible, so we can begin drilling.

"By the way, I'm looking for Lane, the ranger up here, on a little matter of some leases. Do you know whether or not he is around?"

Lane had ridden out that morning to visit the Squaw Peak lookout station, Hammond told Christy. The ranger would not be back before evening.

"I'll look in tomorrow, then," said the engineer. "By the way," he continued, "I've taken that big ramshackle barn of a house down by the creek, across from the Meadows place, and expect my wife up in a few days, for the summer. Glad to have you drop over some evening for a hand at the cards."

When the engineer had gone Hammond turned once more to his drawing-board, but

he did not take up the lettering pen which he had laid down when Christy entered. The engineer's friendliness, and his invitation were a surprise to Gil. Was it possible that Christy had not heard of the California trouble? No; that couldn't account for it. Christy was an intimate friend of the Powells. And the dean of men had made inquiries of him about the bet which Gil had made with the engineer. Of course, he knew all the details of the affair.

Christy was a bluff straight-spoken fellow. Gil felt that his friendliness had not been assumed. The thought helped drive away the bitter reflections which the sight of the engineer had aroused.

An hour later Jim-Jams came pattering in to tell him that dinner was ready; and Hammond followed the youngster across the road, to join Mrs. Lane and Helen in the midday meal.

"I'm going to ride up to the lookout station on the Flatiron, tomorrow morning," he told Helen. "There's a pretty fair trail all the way up. Want to go 'long?"

Helen would be delighted to go along, and so expressed herself. Next morning she appeared at breakfast, dressed in her hiking costume, plus a pair of high laced boots, which she laughingly informed her sister, would eliminate all future embarrassment in the way of stockings. Hammond packed the lunch which the girl had prepared, together with a supply of tobacco and other small necessities for Butler, the lookout man, and placed them in his saddle bags.

"Back this afternoon, if we don't meet up

with a grizzly—or the Meighans,” he laughingly told the ranger and his wife, who watched them ride away, across the valley.

“A penny—yea, verily, two-bits for your thoughts, my dear,” grinned Lane, as they returned to the bungalow.

“Do you think so, Jim?” asked his wife, with extreme irrelevance.

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The sun had just appeared over the eastern mountains, and his rays were lifting the gray fog stratum which had settled over night in the valley, as the two cantered easily down the sandy road and splashed into the broad shallow ford which crossed the creek. There was still a tingle in the air. Gil and Helen inhaled deep breaths, and thrilled with the joy of being alive.

Out in the stream they stopped to allow the horses to drink. The water, crystal-clear, splashed and gurgled around the horses' feet. Down amid the moss-fringed pebbles which covered the bottom of the stream, Gil and Helen could see big, shadowy trout, flapping lazily in the current, or darting away like swift-spiced shadows.

Leaving the stream behind, the riders followed the road up a narrow canyon between the mountains which bordered the valley. They finally abandoned the road for a logging trail which doubled back around the mountainside and came out on the point of a ridge, overlooking the entire valley.

Gil stopped and tied his horse to a pine; then he turned to the girl, who still sat motionless, too deeply impressed for words.

“Let’s go down to the edge of the cliffs,” he told her. “It shows up better there.”

They descended from the trail a little way and came out on the point of a ridge overlooking away from the mountain in a sheer drop of hundreds of feet, to the bottom of the narrow canyon which they had ascended from the valley. To the left, and straight ahead, lay the entire Beaver River Valley, shut in by towering, jagged-topped mountain ranges—with its little river silver-threaded in the morning sun. Helen traced the course of the stream from the mouth, where it emptied into the Clark’s Fork of the Columbia, to its source, a long, forked, glittering sheet of silver, shut in by pine-fringed mountains and weather-stained cliffs—Beaver Lake.

“Isn’t it wonderful?” asked the girl.

“It sure is. The right words for it haven’t been coined, I guess. Ever watch the sunrise from the top of the Continental Divide?”

“No; tell me about it.”

He paused a moment.

“Well, you’re up there—above everyone, and everything, also—with the brand-new air about you, and a new blue sky above you—with the good old rock-ribbed earth below you, stretching away in every direction in endless waves of mountains that fade into the sky like mighty waves of the sea, caught and frozen as they tower—with you on the tallest tip of the biggest wave. And down in the troughs between, like the spray that has fallen from the tips of the waves and has also been caught in mid-air, are the billowing foamy clouds that hide the bases of the mountains, and leave their tips—a jagged

line of breaker-peaks, rolling back to the horizon.

“The sun’s rim pushes itself into the sky and lights up the breaker-tips, the spray-clouds begin to drift away; and in a few moments the new blue sky becomes a gray-blue dome; and the big wave-mountains are just mountains, fringed with spruce and pine, and capped with jagged spires and painted fortresses of aged seamed granite.

“It’s all so big and fresh and clean,” he went on. “It makes the biggest, most important person in the world appear so puny and insignificant by comparison.

“When I get to feeling especially useless and unimportant, it takes something like this—” he waved his hand toward the valley—“to make me realize that people are pretty much on a par after all.”

“Don’t you think that they are though?” asked the girl. “I mean that they are all just people—just folks? An old doctor once told me that he thought people were like marble. Sometimes one finds it in huge moss-grown cliffs, stained by time and weather; sometimes it appears as little pebbles that are washed and rolled and jostled along in the stream of circumstances; often it is seen in magnificent buildings, or in delicately modeled statues. But if one blasts the cliffs, or cracks the pebble, or breaks the statue the plain marble is revealed. I think that it is so with people. Whether we are cliffs, or pebbles, or statues; underneath is just the plain marble of human nature. It makes us so close akin, after all.”

“Now and then the analogy doesn’t appear

to hold, however. Take people like the Meighans; how do they fit into your scheme of things?"

"Don't you think that their condition is due to a diseased mentality? The boys have been given a heritage of bitterness and suspicion. Their environment has intensified those traits. Instinctively, they look upon others with hatred and suspicion. Don't you believe that these things, together with a mistaken conception of human relationships, are responsible for their attitude?"

"That might hold for the Meighans," he replied. "But aren't there some people who are fundamentally bad?"

"No; I think that there are many who are weak by nature and impulsive. There are none of us entirely good, you know. People with equal mentalities develop along different lines, according to conditions. I like to look upon them all as just people, and lay the blame for their shortcomings on circumstances. Who can say what you and I might have been, had we been born in India—or on Beaver River, for that matter?"

"Mine may be a faulty philosophy, but it explains things; and it does away with useless hatred and bitterness. That itself is worth something, don't you think?"

"You're right," he returned thoughtfully. "That is—I hope you're right. I—I don't know."

He picked up a bit of shale and sailed it out into the canyon. He was thinking of Powell. Was it possible that there might be some excuse for the fellow's treachery, after all? Gil had

pondered the question many times before. The bitterness of the wrong which his roommate had done him still rankled. His friendship for Powell had been deep and sincere. While under no circumstance could the former status be resumed, Gil's own philosophy needed the assurance that the fellow's actions had not been base, premeditated treachery.

As to the others, Gil thought that in a measure he could grasp their point of view. To them the word, Fraternity, meant simply a name, old and honorable. That name must not be tarnished, even by one of their members. Like idol-worshipers, they had grown to reverence the symbol and forget the living truth for which it stood. They had been hasty and thoughtless. Their idol had been tarnished by one of their own members, they believed; and, with the eager frenzy of zealots, they tried to wipe out the stain, forgetful of the real meaning of that word, Fraternity.

His sister—she too had always been a worshiper of false gods. Respectability, social position—they had been her idols. Was she so much to blame for her weakness and lack of understanding? Maybe not.

Helen watched the play of his expressions, as he stood sailing little bits of rock out into the canyon.

"What is it, Gil?" she asked softly. "Tell me about it."

He turned to the girl. Her face was alight with sympathy and understanding.

"I can't—just yet, Helen," he told her quietly. "I think that you would understand though, little girl."

He held out his hand, and as the girl's soft palm nestled warmly in his big one, she returned his slow whimsical smile with one of friendly camaraderie—although she had flushed to the roots of her hair.

XIV

Helen's lessons in the art of fishing progressed quite rapidly. Under Gil's coaching she soon learned to cast very creditably, and the ranger taught her many useful secrets about "gray hackles," "coachmen," salmon eggs and grasshoppers. The girl became very enthusiastic over the sport. Her catches often equaled, sometimes bettered, those of Hammond or of the ranger. Hardly a day passed that Helen did not spend a few hours on the river, or up one of the small creeks which came down from the gulches between the mountains. Sometimes she was accompanied by Gil or Lane, more often by Jim-Jams.

One evening Hammond and the girl were casting into a big eddy adjoining the meadow at the upper end of the Knutson place when two other fishermen appeared on the bank above them. Gil had waded waist deep into the pool. Helen stood at its lower edge, trailing her flies in the ripples. At a hail of "What luck?" from the bank, he turned and saw Christy and his wife, dressed like Helen in hiking costume, scrambling down the bank to the edge of the pool.

"Pretty fair," he told them as he splashed to the shore. "We have seventeen or eighteen apiece, I believe."

He shook hands with Mrs. Christy and introduced Helen. The engineer was eager to try his luck. After the civilities were over he and

Gil waded the stream and began casting from the opposite side.

Mrs. Christy was a tall, angular woman, about thirty years old. She was quite friendly and talkative. Soon the two had discovered mutual acquaintances in Portland, and were exchanging reminiscences. As Mrs. Christy did not care to fish, they kept to the bank and talked, while the men followed the stream down through the meadow. When Gil and Helen left them, down at the bridge at the Knutson place, Mrs. Christy invited the two young people to call the following evening. Christy warmly seconded her invitation.

"Be sure to come," he urged. "We haven't had a caller since we came to the River. That old barn is like a morgue. If you people play rum, or whist, or five-hundred, or any other game you can mention—poker not barred—Bess and I are anxious to challenge you for the championship of the River."

Helen and Gil spent the following evening with the Christys, and a few days later the girl and Mrs. Lane called on Mrs. Christy. The engineer's wife found life on the River more or less lonely, owing to the fact that her husband's work kept him at the derrick most of the day. After the families had become acquainted she frequently drove to the station in her husband's old runabout. A warm friendship developed between Lane and Christy.

Neither the engineer nor his wife had alluded to Hammond's experience, or to his life in California. The young man was grateful for this. While he meant eventually to make a clean breast of the whole affair to the Lanes and

Helen, still he dreaded doing so. He was finding life on the River very pleasant. He hated anything that recalled his California experiences. Lane had refused to listen when Gil had started to tell him of the affair. And no subsequent opportunity had offered itself.

The young man was sure that the details would make no difference to the ranger, or to his wife. To the girl, although he was anxious to prove her loyalty, he dreaded making his confession. Gil was conscious of his growing interest in Helen, and did not attempt to deceive himself as to its trend. This, more than anything else, was responsible for his silence. Although he was anxious for the girl's respect and friendship, he did not want her sympathy or pity. He preferred to share his troubles with no one.

Mrs. Christy, however, was in no way reluctant to discuss Hammond's affairs. On more than one occasion a quick glance from her husband had checked her during an overly-loquacious outburst. Although the good lady meant no harm, nor would she willingly have done anyone an injury, she belonged to that large class of women—and men—to whom anything in the way of a secret to be withheld is an extreme form of mental torture. Christy, on the other hand, attempted to live up to the theory that every man's business is that particular man's own business—and is to be regarded strictly as such.

"I would leave Hammond's past entirely out of all discussions, Bess," he told her. "If he cares to mention it, well and good. Probably he does not. That too is his own affair, you know.

To my mind, he got a rotten deal down there. That's as it may be. Let's not add to what he already has to worry over by making unnecessary remarks or inquiries."

Mrs. Christy made a solemn resolve to curb her curiosity, and likewise her tongue—but the mental torture did not abate.

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As the summer progressed and the forests became dry and parched, the fire situation became more serious. On three or four occasions Lane or Hammond was compelled to take out a crew of fire-fighters, composed of men from the neighboring ranches, in order to get the blazes under control. Now that the haying season was on, the collecting of such crews became more difficult.

So far, although a few of the fires had been rather dangerous, they had not been more frequent than the average quota of lightning and accidental blazes. No two of the more serious ones had occurred simultaneously.

Lane began to think that possibly Old Man Meighan had told the truth after all, and that the Meighan boys had left the country. No one appeared to have seen or heard of either of them. A seeming drought of moonshine liquor on the River went further to prove their absence. Sam Wah, the Chinaman who ran the ferry, had also made one of his periodical disappearances, Lane told Hammond, after the former had returned from a trip to Noxon. Whether or not this might indicate anything, the ranger and Gil could only surmise.

One evening, less hot and oppressive than

usual, Lane suggested that they all go for a ride.

"How about a little jolt up to the Lake?" he asked. "Elizabeth has been on her good behavior lately. I think that we ought to show our unanimous appreciation for her benevolent condescension by trusting ourselves to her tender mercies."

"You undoubtedly missed your calling, Jim," Helen told him, smiling at the "unanimous appreciation—benevolent condescension." "You should have been an English professor, in a young ladies' seminary. Your language is so simple and elegantly turned."

"Like your biscuits," he retorted dryly. "They are so 'simple and elegantly turned' that you have to splice two of 'em together before you can spread butter on 'em."

"You had better bring a coat or something, Helen," Mrs. Lane suggested. "It's going to be chilly coming back."

Helen ran to her room and opened the closet door to get her coat. From a hook in front of her hung Sandy Dinwiddie's big maroon sweater, with its silver block M, and gold service stripes. The girl started to take it, hesitated for a moment, frowned and tossed her head at her hesitation, and snatching the sweater from its hook, ran back and joined the others in the car.

Hammond had not seen the sweater before; but he recognized it as a man's sweater, such as universities are accustomed to give to athletes. Its big block M indicated that. He also realized the significance of Helen's having the sweater. It might be her brother's of course;

but Helen had no brother. In fact, he knew that she had no near relatives, other than the Lanes and her aunt in Portland.

According to accepted university tradition, her possession of the sweater meant one of two things; it meant that she was engaged, or at least "spoken for." In the former case a fraternity pin might go with the sweater. But Helen wore no fraternity pin—not even her own, although Hammond knew that she belonged to a sorority.

He was conscious of a strong feeling of disappointment, even though he admitted to himself that Helen had given him no just cause for such a feeling. Had he made his interest in her so evident that Helen had worn the sweater as a tactful hint that she was already engaged?

He had thought at times, had hoped, that the interest might be mutual. There had been moments—up on the cliffs, and when they had played and sung together—when the girl had seemed—responsive. And their comradeship had been perfect. But Helen had not flirted with him; he was forced to admit that. By no word or deed had she even so much as hinted at the possibility of her ever being more to him than a comrade, a pal—"the best little pal in the world," he had told her.

Well, he had been dreaming dreams again, he told himself bitterly, as he thought of Dorothy Paige. But Helen was not like Dorothy. She *was* the straightest "best little pal in the world," even though she were engaged. Well, he could play the game too. If she were engaged—Gil was no poacher; but if she were not,

the owner of the sweater would not be alone in the running.

One thing he resolved to do at the earliest opportunity. That was to tell Helen of his California trouble. Having once admitted to himself that he loved the girl—the sweater had forced him to a recognition of the fact—he knew that he could never tell her so without first making known the stain which was upon his name.

Helen noticed his unnatural silence.

“What is it, Gil?” she teased; “the Princess again?”

“No; I was thinking about a prince,” he replied easily, “—the Prince of the Sweater, who always remained a prince.”

Helen considered. Should she tell him that there wasn't a prince? No; he had refused to tell her his secret; she would make him wait.

“Did I say that he had always remained a prince?” she laughed. “Perhaps he turned out to be a poet—or a peasant.”

“And the poet-peasant was better than the prince? He would be more romantic, at least. Princes are getting to be common now-a-days, don't you think?”

“A real prince could never be common. It was only the pretenders who were common, if you remember the story. And your Princess, who was merely a girl—did she prove to be a peasant-poetess?”

“No; she removed her mask, and I realized that I had only been to a costume ball,” he grinned.

“What a tragedy! And I suppose you made

her believe that she was a real princess!" she smiled at him impishly.

"Unfortunately, I had been urging her that it was better to be a peasant."

"And she agreed?"

"She refused."

"Why?"

"Because she believed herself to be a princess. She couldn't be the one, and wouldn't be the other."

"That *was* a tragedy, wasn't it? Then, I suppose, you deserted her."

"Oh no; she deserted me."

"And you were heartbroken, of course?" with twinkling eyes.

"Not for long."

"Why, pray?"

"Because she had removed the mask."

"I see," she mused. "You wanted a real princess, who would consent to become a peasant," another twinkle.

"I wanted real love, Helen. That would have meant confidence—faith. She didn't know the meaning of either of them."

"Do you think the two always go together?" asked the girl.

"Don't you?" he parried.

"Yes, I think that faith would have to go with love. It wouldn't work the other way 'round, though," again the twinkle. "I used to have unlimited faith in my psychology professor; but I didn't love him. He was married."

"He was your friend, probably. Do you always have faith in your friends, Helen?" he asked seriously.

"Yes; I realize that they are human, of course, and are apt to make mistakes. I think that I always have faith in them."

"I want to tell you something about myself," he said earnestly. "Will you promise to try to have faith in me, Helen?"

The girl met his gaze frankly. "The telling won't make any difference. It isn't necessary," she told him quietly.

"Why, Helen?"

"Because—because I already have the faith, Gil."

"And why?"

"Because you are my friend. I know you. And I know that you would not allow yourself to do anything—dishonorable, Gil."

"But suppose I *had* allowed myself to do something dishonorable—what about the faith?"

"I should still have it."

"And why, again?"

"Because I know that the good in you is sufficient to make you atone for the wrong—if you *had* done it, Gil."

"Thank God, I didn't do it, Helen," he said huskily.

"I knew it," the girl replied simply.

Hammond was deeply moved. He sat for a moment in silence.

"Let me tell you about it, Helen," he said at last. They had driven more than a mile up the lake shore. Neither had been conscious of their surroundings.

"No," the girl replied hastily. The car had already begun to slow down. "Why, we're al-

ready at the lake! You can tell me any—any time you wish, Gil.”

The ranger stopped the car and turned to the back seat.

“Why the august solemnity?” he asked. “You two look as serious as the proverbial pair of boiled owls. One would think that you had been settling the fate of the Allied Nations.”

“The fate of nations is trivial, compared with the importance of our conversation, Jim,” Helen replied lightly.

“I thought as much,” returned the ranger dryly.

Mrs. Lane gazed down at the rumpled sleeping Jim-Jams and smiled.

Helen, like Gil, had been deeply moved by the conversation. Now she felt strangely quiet and happy. Her woman’s intuition had just told her two things which she wished to know very much. She no longer asked herself the question, Is he the Prince? Something had told her, He is the Prince!—and he loves me! She gazed dreamily out across the lake, but its beauties could not replace the magic of the things which she had just learned.

Gil had no woman’s intuition to tell him things, but he too felt a strange sense of the rightness of the world. His faith in Helen—faith that she would have faith in him—had been justified. He did not allow himself to ponder over such things as engagements and sweaters; this was more important, more vital. Here was real faith and understanding—the faith of Old Doc England and of the Lanes. This girl knew the real meaning of the word “Fraternity.” She was everything that he had

thought Dorothy Paige to be—everything that Dorothy could never hope to be. The assurance gave him a renewed confidence in himself and in his philosophy of life.

The ranger went down to the landing, and taking an old tin bucket, filled the steaming radiator of the Ford. Gil left the car also, and strolling down to the edge of the lake, lit his pipe. The ranger watched the young man with a sympathetic grin.

As they drove up the lake shore, the two on the back seat did not resume their former conversation.

“This road leaves the lake a few miles up, and goes down to Alta Vista, on the Great Northern,” Gil told the girl. “The lake itself is midway between the N. P. and G. N. lines. It is something like thirty miles, and down grade, to either. The lake here is situated on top of the water-shed. All the country around here, except a homestead or two, is now in the National Forest Reserve. It’s still pretty much of a wilderness, as you can see.

“Jim has a notion,” he continued, “that our good friends, the Meighan boys, are hiding out somewhere around here, making moonshine liquor. Those cliffs over there certainly would be an ideal place for it.” He pointed to the line of towering cliffs at the further side of the lake.

The cliffs were massive and overhanging. A number of vertical cleavages in their face had divided the pile into a series of stall-like partitions. From the bottom of these cleavages, which began about a third of the way up the face of the cliffs, enormous slides of shale

descended to the water's edge, giving the whole an effect of gigantic buttressed ramparts, with the lake itself for a moat. The afternoon sun was just tipping the crest of the mountains as the party drove around the edge of the lake, and the cliffs lay reflected in stately grandeur, from the motionless, cool, green depths.

They left the main highway at the southern end of the lake and followed a logging road, little better than a trail, which kept to the shore line, around to the base of the cliffs.

Suddenly the engine missed fire, sputtered feebly a few times, and stopped dead. Lane got out and lifted the hood. Gil joined him and together they examined the engine.

"Spark plugs, I imagine," said the ranger. "Well, you didn't catch us napping this time, Elizabeth. I have an even dozen new ones under the back seat."

Helen sprang out and he lifted the rear cushion, in order to get at the plugs. When these were screwed in place Elizabeth still refused to budge. She had indeed caught them napping.

Gil examined the engine carefully.

"Coils all O. K.," he said. "Spark plugs fine and dandy—wiring perfect—plenty of oil, plenty of gas—carburetor and timer working like the Gold Dust Twins—. Wait a minute! Let's take a look at that timer, Jim. Open her up."

The ranger took off the timer and they examined it. A small metal roller, scarcely an inch in diameter, proved to be the cause of the trouble.

"Wouldn't that bumfuzzle your grand-

mother?" said Lane disgustedly, as he fingered the brush. "Cracked right in two in the middle. Elizabeth, verily thou art as fickle as thy royal namesake. Yea, in truth, thou hast hornswoggled us. Moral: Put not your trust in queens—or flivvers!

"Well, luckily there is a service telephone line from Squaw Peak that cuts across above the lake, down below the cliffs," he told Gil. "There is a portable instrument here in the car. I'll call up Flathead Joe, down at the station, and have him send up Davis to tow us in.

"Won't Davis howl though, when he hears we're stuck!"

"I'll go call up, Jim," Hammond offered. "You stay here with the ladies."

"Delighted, my friend, delighted," returned the ranger. "It's a little better than a mile and a half of rough walking around the face of those cliffs. You go with my blessing."

"I think that I'll go along too, Gil, if you don't mind," said the girl. "I've been wishing for a close-up view of those cliffs for the last half-hour."

"It would appear that Elizabeth's incapacity were truly providential, my dear," the ranger remarked dryly. "Go, by all means—that is, of course, provided our modest young friend, Gil, doesn't resent your unmaidenly intrusion," he added, with a wink at Mrs. Lane.

"No hard feelings at all," Gil returned easily. "In fact, I was just waiting for Jim to give me an opportunity to suggest that you come along," he told Helen with a smile.

"The affair appears to have simmered down

to merely another case of woman's proposing," grinned the forester.

"There's an old boat hidden in the willows below the cabin," he informed Gil. "Here is the key. You can probably save yourselves a little rough going, and incidentally get a better perspective of the landscape by rowing back." He tossed Gil the key.

"Adios, brave deliverers! We'll bide here, and attempt to keep Elizabeth from flitting away while you are gone."

Hammond slung the service telephone, in its leather case, over his shoulder and they followed the logging road to the edge of the cliffs. Here the road gave place to a rather uncertain path, leading around the base of the crags and over the shale slides.

"These rocks are a regular echo-place," he told her, as they stopped to admire the cliffs. "One can stand on the other side of the lake and yodle—or yell, as the case may be—and the echoes come back across the water with an almost weird distinctness."

"I love echoes," replied the girl. "Do you yodle?"

"Oh no; I merely yell. I was up here with Butler, one day, mending telephone line. He did the yodling. That's how I came to find out about the echoes."

They finally left the bottom of the cliffs, where they turned back around the mountain side, and came out into an almost level glade in the yellow pine grove which covered the alluvial fan, marking the point where Lightning Creek left the gulch and emptied into the lake. In the center of the glade, a few yards from

the edge of the lake, stood the old, dilapidated cabin which Lane had mentioned.

Gil searched the willows for a few moments and found the boat which the ranger had told him about. It was a long battered bateau, the kind lumbermen use in timber drives. As he looked at the boat Hammond gave an exclamation of surprise. The willow to which the bateau had been chained and locked was cut away a few feet from the ground. The chain had been removed and lay in the bow of the boat, which was tied to another willow with a rope.

Amidships lay a small, red-painted steel drum, such as one sees containing moderate quantities of acids or other chemicals around a laboratory. Gil climbed into the boat and examined the drum. It was empty. Unscrewing the cap at one end, he found that it still smelled faintly of gasoline.

Wading a few yards up the shore, to where the marsh grass came down to the water's edge, he called softly to Helen. The girl parted the willows and started to cross the short strip of sandy beach where the boat was fastened.

"Look out!" he warned, motioning her back. "Come around this way, Helen. . . . What do you think of that?" he asked, pointing to the drum.

"Why—somebody has been using the boat!" she exclaimed. "What use could they have had for a barrel up here, Gil?" she asked.

"Yes, somebody's been using it; and I imagine that they are planning to use it again pretty soon, from the looks of things. That drum quite recently held several gallons of gasoline. Gasoline makes good fuel. I sur-

mise that the Meighan boys have planned that the drum will contain a few gallons of moonshine liquor on the return trip."

"You mean—you think that they have a moonshine still around here somewhere?" asked the girl.

"Yes; I'm practically certain of it. Let's get out of this, Helen. I'm not especially anxious to meet up with any of them out here, just now. Are you?"

Helen was not. They worked their way back through the grass to the glade, where Gil had left his telephone. He was careful that the girl should leave no footprints; and had left none himself; although his own probably would not have been noticed.

"We'd better talk pretty low," he told her, in subdued tones. "These confounded echoes around here are liable to do almost anything. I'll call up Flathead Joe."

He guided her through the trees toward the mouth of the gulch.

"Are you going to have him tell Mr. Davis about the boat?" the girl asked in a tense whisper.

"No; not now, at least. I belong to the Forest Service, not the Internal Revenue. Of course, we owe the Meighans one for their little tricks. But I don't like the job of informer. I'll tell Jim, when we get back to the car. He can do what he thinks best.

"We've actually seen no one, yet, you know," he continued. "The Meighans would have to be caught red-handed—with the goods. And I'd rather nothing would happen while you and Mrs. Lane are up here. You might be called

upon as witnesses. That, of course, would be a nuisance."

Twilight had already set in when they reached the telephone line which came down the Lightning Creek gulch. The wires were fastened to the trees. Gil climbed a pine, attached his instrument and called the ranger station. Flat-head Joe answered and after a few minutes informed Gil that Joe Davis would come to their assistance as soon as possible.

Owing to the fact that the Squaw Peak line was not connected with the regular telephone system, Hammond could not talk directly to the deputy.

"Davis will be up as soon as possible," he told the girl. "We'd better be getting back to the folks. We'll have to hike it, of course. If we took the boat the Meighans would know that somebody was on to their little tricks. We're going to have to make it snappy or it will be good and dark before we get around the cliffs."

They hurried through the woods, keeping within the shelter of the trees, in case anyone should have happened to come down to the landing while Gil was telephoning. As they approached the cliffs, the sound of voices came distinctly from the rocks above them.

Helen, tense with excitement, clasped Gil's arm and stopped.

"Our friends appear to be at home this evening," he whispered. "Let's see if we can catch the trend of their conversation."

They drew back behind a bunchy fir tree and waited.

XV

“Jar loose there, Bill, and lend a hand with these cans,” came from the rocks to the two in the woods below the cliffs. The voice was unfamiliar to Gil.

“Aw, don’t get previous,” came the sarcastic retort, in the unmistakable tones of Bill Meighan. “What’s your hurry? You ain’t agoin’ to bring your damned old truck up till midnight, anyway. Take it easy. That booze will keep.”

“Might as well get it down to the boat while it’s light enough to see. We’re not usin’ no lanterns up here. Come on; give us a lift on these cans.” This last from a third speaker—Cliff Meighan, Gil thought. The two in the woods did not catch the grumbling retort. Bill had evidently decided to “jar loose,” as the voices were coming closer.

“When do we get our coin outa this thing, Buzz?” came the question, in Bill’s disagreeable tones. “I’m wantin’ to see the jack right sudden.”

“You know the agreement,” the man named Buzz retorted sharply. “Five bones per — delivered in Sand Point. You get two-fifty; I get two-fifty; an’ I’m takin’ the long chances. When I turn the stuff over to the Chink I get the coin. Then it’s up to him. You’ll get yours tomorrow night. If that ain’t satisfactory get somebody else to do your freightin’.”

The moonshiners were coming through the

trees, about a hundred yards to the right of where Gil and Helen stood. Each of the three men carried a bucket or can. The men were plainly visible to the two behind the fir tree. Evidently the buckets were all filled, as Bill's next remark indicated.

"Quit your splashin'!" he snapped. "What do you think this is—a swimmin' party?"

"Aw, go soak your head in the lake—an' kid the squawfish. What's a eatin' on you anyhow, Bill?" drawled his brother goodnaturedly. "Don't mind the old porcupine, Buzz. This deal's satisfactory. Bill's fallin' in love, I think. Haw-haw!—haw!"

Gil turned to Helen with a broad smile. The idea of Bill's being in love amused him immensely.

"Let's beat it," he told her. "We can get around the cliffs while they are down at the landing. They will be hidden by that clump of willows."

They hurried through the woods to the cliffs and followed the path around the edge of the lake. Over the water snatches of the conversation still came to them. Bill was venting his grouch on the other two.

"I hope Jim doesn't show a light till we get there," Hammond said. "They'll see Davis, when he comes up the road, of course. But when he tows Elizabeth back, that ought to explain the trip."

"Well, how's that for a real slice of spicy melodrama, partner?" he asked her.

"It certainly was realistic—far more so than the movies," replied the girl. "Gil, will you do me a favor?" she queried.

“Why—yes, of course. What is it, Helen?”

“I—I wish that you wouldn’t tell Jim or Mr. Davis what we saw. Not tonight—that is—unless you think that you ought to, of course.”

He was silent for a moment.

“I can’t see that it would make any real difference—not telling them tonight. Davis would probably make a raid on them if Jim saw fit to tell him. But not till we’d taken you and Mrs. Lane home, of course. A day or so couldn’t affect matters one way or the other. So far as the moral obligation goes, I’m not bound to tell it at all.”

“Then why tell it? If Mr. Davis should make a raid tonight, someone would probably be killed. It might be he, or Jim—or you. Isn’t there some way of arranging it without the gun-play? Neither you nor Jim are hot-headed, but if Jim were to tell Mr. Davis he would deputize you both without a moment’s hesitation; and you would go up there with your guns and meet those men, feeling certain that you were perfectly justified in doing so—and someone would be killed.”

“Not necessarily.”

“That’s just it—not necessarily,” the girl urged. “Oh, I know that you’re not afraid—”

“I didn’t say so,” he replied.

“No; but you thought so. It isn’t a question of fear. It’s the calm and serene manner that men have of disregarding human life when carrying out the mandates of this thing they call the Law.”

“Such things are men’s work, Helen. They must be done some way. The criminals can’t be left at large, you know,” he told her quietly.

"Yes, they are men's work; and men go at them in their confident, thoughtless, manly way. Isn't there some other way? The Meighan boys are human beings, not beasts. Couldn't they be appealed to as such?"

"It has often been tried, but has never proved very successful. Anyhow, I'll keep it to myself for tonight. There is something in what you say, Helen. I hadn't thought of it before—from the criminal's point of view."

"And you'll let me know when you decide to tell Jim?"

"Yes; I think I'd better let him know tomorrow. Don't you?"

"Perhaps. Thank you for not telling tonight, Gil."

"It's all right," he replied, as they came in sight of the car.

The ranger advanced to meet them. "What luck?" he queried. "Did you get Davis?"

"Yes, he's on his way up here now—ought to be here any minute," Gil informed him.

"What about the boat? Didn't you find it?" Lane asked.

"We decided to walk back," Helen replied.

A pair of headlights appeared far up the lake, and the sound of Davis' car echoed from the cliffs and broke the stillness of the night. The lights swept around the north end of the body of water and Davis, stopping his car, gave a goodnatured hallo.

"What's this? What's this?" he called. "Figgerin' on homesteadin' permanent up here, Jim—or just out enjoyin' the beauties of nature?"

"No; merely looking for the ghost of the

Great Ancestral Beaver—the one they named the lake after. But the beauties of nature are so striking hereabouts that Elizabeth seems to have struck also, out of sheer sympathy.”

“Aw, why don’t you use that old rattle-trap for a coffee grinder an’ get a *real car*, Jim? You act like a man of intelligence and discretion in other respects.”

“Like your car, I suppose? I hear you’ve been taking out quite a little insurance lately, Joe. Didn’t get anyone to write you a six-bit policy on *that* old bus, did you?” queried the ranger innocently.

“Jim Lane, I’ve a mind to arrest you, right here and now. You’re an ornery, malicious an’ premeditatin’ disturber of the peace; an’ you jest naturally deserve to be pinched for it,” Davis accused wrathfully.

“What’s wrong this time, Joe?” drawled Lane. “Gophers been getting too intimate with your garden? They don’t come under the Forest Service jurisdiction—and you’re a game warden, too, you know.”

“Gophers—nothin’!” retorted Davis, as he fastened a chain to the front axle of Elizabeth. “It ain’t gophers; it’s insurance agents! There’s been six of them loose-tongued pests down there in the last two weeks. Every one of ’em talked a leg offen me—told me that *you* sent ’em down, and guaranteed ’em a policy! Didn’t you know well an’ good that I wasn’t figgerin’ on takin’ out no more insurance?”

“I’ve got a mind to leave yore doggoned old pile of tin cans and balin’ wire up here in the woods.”

Lane disregarded this last bitter insult to Elizabeth.

“Didn’t you know that you were a centipede, Joe? Still, in case you do lose a dozen or so more of your legs, an accident policy might come in handy,” he drawled maliciously.

Davis sniffed disgustedly. “Yore idea of a joke is sure some mournful and heart-sickenin’,” he grunted, by way of ending the discussion.

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As Hammond sat in his room that night, after their return to the station, he pondered over what the girl had said about the Meighans. She had told him that they were human beings. Had he and the ranger been considering them as such? Gil flushed as he realized that he had been doing the very thing he had hated his former fraternity brothers for doing—accepting a man as being wholly bad merely upon outward evidence. How did he know that there was not some good in one of them, say Cliff, at least?

The details of the two situations were not similar, but the same principle governed both. In his case he had been condemned for a thing that he did not do, and had been made an outcast by his friends and fellows. He had hated those friends and fellows for their lack of faith—because they had not lived up to his ideals of fellowship. They had not given him a chance.

The Meighans, too, had been condemned and made outcasts. Their condemnation had been just, but were they to be hunted down like wild

beasts because they had actually violated the legal code? Was there no tie which still bound them to their fellow men? Was he justified in forgetting the tie because the Meighans had done so?

True, they had "gone wrong," were a menace to Society; but Society, he included, had more or less placidly accepted them as a menace, and by doing so, had encouraged them to continue as such. Had anyone tried to keep them from being a menace? Had the Meighans been given their chance to "come back"?

This thing, Fraternity, which he had pondered so much about—was it such a dwarfed principle that it only applied to a selected group? The Brotherhood of Mankind! He had read of it; had considered it as a vague abstraction. If it were a reality, didn't it include every human being—even the Meighans?

Gil found it difficult to reconcile his old attitude with this new conception. He had often seen criminals, had pitied them; but, like too many other people, he had considered them as a class, to be dealt with in a manner different from that used toward other people. He had not given very serious thought to the statement made by Helen, on their trip up the Flatiron, that all men are influenced by heredity, environment—especially home environment—and by the opinions of their fellows. Now he recalled the conversation, and saw its application.

Helen had the true conception—what a girl she was! Not another like her in the world, he told himself. Such a perfect little pal—and such a woman! Then he thought of the sweater which she had carried the night before, but had

not worn. With the thought came a momentary twinge of bitterness. Was the owner of the sweater worthy of her he wondered? No; no man, however perfect, could be worthy of her—the girl who had enough sympathy and friendship for the whole world—even for him and the Meighans!

What ought he to do about them? Of course he would have to tell the ranger about his and Helen's discovery. His loyalty to Lane demanded that; but was there no way in which the affair might be settled without arrests, damning prison terms, or perhaps deaths? Now was the time for him to tell. It was the moment for definite, decisive action—not for pondering abstractions and philosophies!

Was his love for the girl weakening his moral stamina, he wondered for a moment? A week ago he would have laughed at the suggestion that the Meighans were not getting fair play. As he mulled the situation over in his mind, Gil decided that this new conception, the one which Helen had given him, was the correct one. Tomorrow he would tell Lane and they would at least try to formulate a plan for dealing with the Meighans.

After breakfast next morning Helen walked with Gil to the gate. "You haven't told Jim yet?" she asked him quietly, as they left the bungalow.

"No. You know you made me promise not to without first telling you," he reminded her. "I was planning to do so this morning."

"Let me tell him, Gil."

"Why, certainly, if you wish, Helen."

"I'll do it this afternoon," she promised. "I want you to be present when I do, of course."

"Anything you say goes with me," he replied. "I've been thinking over what you said last night, Helen, and I agree with you that possibly we haven't been looking at this thing in just the right manner. I want us three to get together and see if we can't plan a sensible way out of it."

"I'm sure we can," the girl told him confidently.

Half an hour later Gil saw Helen mount her pony and ride away up the valley. He thought little of the incident at the time, as Helen frequently rode over to one of the neighboring ranch houses for a morning visit. The girl had made friends with everyone, and these little calls were very pleasant to her, as well as to the families of the ranchers. Lane had gone over to the derrick to see Christy. Gil was alone at the station.

As he sat at his desk making out the monthly reports to District Headquarters, Hammond could not keep his mind off Helen. Suddenly he arose and tossed the unfinished reports into a basket. Could it be possible that the girl had gone to visit the Meighans' camp? The more he thought of it the more certain he became that this was just what she had done!

Snatching his revolver from the table drawer, he hurried to the barn where he found Flat-head Joe, just finishing the morning chores.

"Go down to the office and watch the telephone for fire calls until I get back," he told the Indian. "I have to ride up the river," he explained, as he hastily saddled his pony. "Lane

is down at the derrick. Let him know at once if anyone sends in an alarm before I get back.”

As soon as he was out of sight of the bungalow, Gil urged his pony to a gallop. Helen would ride around the lake, the way they had gone the night before, he reasoned. By cutting across through the woods south of the lake he would have time to meet the girl at the cliffs.

Gil did not doubt for a moment that he would meet her—unless Helen got there first. She had planned to go when she talked with him that morning. He left the road at the south end of the lake and turned into the woods. His pony was wet with sweat and lather. Gil was compelled to slacken his pace and pick his way through the undergrowth. Tying his pony to a tree, a quarter of a mile above the cabin, he hurried toward the cliffs on foot.

Fear for Helen, and admiration for her plucky determination, filled his thoughts. His change of attitude toward the Meighans had been well enough, but Helen alone with them was a different matter. The thought was maddening.

He came to the little glade above the landing in the willows, and stopped to scan the cliffs and listen. No one was visible and no sound came from the rocks above. Reassured by the silence, he followed the path around the base of the gray and red-painted cliffs. As he reached the first shale slide, he saw Helen hurrying toward him.

“Gil!—” she exclaimed. The girl was flushed from excitement and surprise at seeing him.

“Helen,” he told her quietly, “you can’t do this. It’s absolutely impossible.”

"Why impossible?" the girl asked. Neither of them mentioned the thing that she proposed doing—to attempt a truce with the Meighans. Each instinctively read the other's thoughts.

Gil did not answer her question. "You stay here, Helen," he bade. "I'll go up and see if things can be arranged."

"Not for a minute," the girl replied firmly. "Let me talk to them, Gil. You will be right here, in case anything should happen," she urged.

"Nothing doing," he replied. "We'll make it a duet." Both realized the futility of argument.

"Very well," she agreed, "but let me talk to them, please, Gil."

They climbed the rocks toward the point where they had first heard the moonshiners' conversation. The cliffs broke away from the mountainside in a series of sharp crags and overhanging ledges. Around the base of the mass lay a confusion of boulders and slabs of metamorphic rock. Presently the two came upon a faint suggestion of a trail, leading back over these. The trail carried them to the very base of the cliffs which were, at this point, hollowed out and overhanging.

Gil and Helen moved cautiously, searching every ledge and break in the face of the rocks for signs of the Meighans. Presently they came to one of the stall-like recesses in the wall of rock. The bottom of the opening was twelve or fifteen feet above the base of the cliffs themselves. It was free from shale, but might easily be climbed by a man on foot. The opening did not show from the lake; in fact, it was not visible

from anywhere in the immediate vicinity, except from the mountain which formed the opposite side of the Lightning Creek gulch. At that distance the opening would appear as a mere shadow in the seamed and weather-stained wall of rock. Both sides of the opening were tilted together at the top, almost entirely excluding the sunlight. The place was an ideal retreat.

Gil climbed to the top of the huge boulder in order to see into the opening. Helen did likewise. On a blanket, thrown over a heap of fir boughs, they saw the figure of a man, evidently asleep. No one else was visible.

Helen drew a deep breath and placed her hand on Gil's arm. "He's asleep," she whispered.

"Yes; I'll let him know that he has visitors," returned Hammond.

"Hello, up there!" he called distinctly.

The man mumbled something and rolled over. At the sight of the two on the rock below, he sat up quickly.

"Good morning!" the girl called pleasantly.

XVI

The man in the opening, now thoroughly awake, sprang to his feet and advanced to the edge of the shelf, pistol in hand.

"What's the big idea?" he demanded belligerently.

"Come on down, Meighan, and let's talk this thing over," Gil offered. He saw that the fellow was Cliff Meighan.

"I reckon I can do my talkin' from right here," retorted the other. "The thing for you to be doin' is to hit the trail outa here, and that right sudden. Brought a girl along to help you, I see. Well, stick up them paws o' yourn, an' make it snappy!"

Gil paid no attention to the order. Instead, he drew his revolver from his pocket and handed the weapon to Helen.

"No, Mr. Meighan," the girl said quickly, "Mr. Hammond did not bring a girl along to help him. I started to come alone, and he suspected what I was going to do and followed me. We came to see if this thing couldn't be straightened out in a sensible manner. We have told no one that we know you are here, and no one knows of our coming. We are anxious to settle this trouble in a manner fair and satisfactory to everyone concerned. Won't you put up your gun, Mr. Meighan, and meet us half way?"

Meighan looked incredulous. The girl's statement appeared to be perfectly honest and sincere, but it was like nothing he had ever heard

before. There was a trick somewhere, he told himself.

"We're not askin' for any settlement," he retorted. "An' we're not expectin' any square deal—not from that bunch down there. If there's some trick to this, you'll get yours mighty sudden." He glared menacingly at Hammond, whom he still had covered with his revolver. Gil filled his pipe and lighted it.

"There isn't any trick," he said. "If there were, do you think that Miss Frasier would have started up here alone? If we had cared to do it, we could have told Davis that you were here; and he could have surrounded you with a posse, or have taken you while you were asleep. We could have had your truck raided last night, if we had wanted to do it. All that we are asking now is that you listen to what we have to say, and agree or disagree to it, as you see fit."

"I don't give a —. I'm not wantin' to hear what *you* have to say."

"Listen to Miss Frasier, then."

Meighan looked inquiringly at the girl. "If you're so all-fired friendly and anxious to settle this thing, Miss," he demanded, "suppose you tell me how you come to find out about this place and that truck last night."

"The whole thing was accidental," Helen replied. "We were out for a ride yesterday evening, and our car broke down up at the other end of the lake. Mr. Hammond and I came up here to telephone, and saw you men loading the boat. We have told no one of our discovery."

"Telephone?" jeered Meighan. "How do

you get that way? There isn't a telephone this side of Squaw Peak."

"We had a field telephone in the car," Hammond explained. "I connected it onto the Squaw Peak line and called up the ranger station."

Meighan considered for a few moments. Then he lowered his pistol and replaced it in his pocket.

"Well, what's the big idea?" he asked. "I don't quite savvy it. Want me to turn state's evidence?" he demanded.

"We don't want you to turn state's evidence," she told him. "All we want is that this feud which has been going on between you men to come to an end, and that you stop this illicit distilling. We are not going to ask you for any promises, or put you under any obligations that you will not resume it somewhere else. That is your own affair.

"Are we asking too much?" she finished.

"So you and Lane want to bribe us to keep the peace," the man sneered at Hammond.

"We are trying to bribe you to do nothing," Gil flushed as he replied. "Miss Frasier has offered you a man's chance to act like a man. Lane knows nothing about the affair. If you don't want the chance, say so, and we'll return to the ranger station."

Helen laid her hand on the young man's arm. "Please, Gil—" she begged. "You don't mean that," she told Meighan quietly. "If Mr. Hammond were a coward, would he have come up here as he has done? Did my brother-in-law ever give you reason to think that he is that kind

of man? I don't believe that *you're* a coward, Mr. Meighan."

The man flushed under her steady gaze. "I was a little hasty there, I reckon," he admitted. "I'm makin' no promises, but just what will you do if we agree to call off the scrap an' ditch the still?"

"Mr. Hammond and I will keep silent about what we have learned," said Helen, "and if you care to come down to the station and talk it over with my brother-in-law, I'm sure that he will use his influence to have the charges which are already against you withdrawn. Understand, please, that we are not going to ask you to make any promises which you are not perfectly willing to make.

"But we do believe that if you men are given a chance, and care to take that chance, that there is no reason why you can't be as good citizens as any other men in the community. Because we don't believe that all of you have been given that chance, Mr. Hammond and I came up here this morning. We want you to take it, because you are worth infinitely more to the community as good citizens than as outlaws. Don't you agree with me?"

The girl spoke quietly, but her face was radiant with earnestness and sympathy. The man was silent. It was all more or less beyond his comprehension.

"Meighan," Gil said, "you and I had a fight down the river a few weeks ago, and you gave me a black eye that I carried around for a week. I don't hold that against you. Any man who is a man admires a good fighter. Your brother tried to shoot me at the dance the other night,

but he was drunk. I'm willing to forget that too—and those other things I'll not mention.

“You and I haven't any reason to be enemies, that I can see. I'm not blaming you for what you did. Things haven't been exactly pleasant for any of you up here on the River. Maybe you weren't entirely to blame for it. Many another man, under like conditions, would have done the same things that you personally have done. If you care to, I'm willing to shake hands and forget the whole affair. What do you say?”

Meighan remained silent for a few moments. His face showed signs of a mental struggle.

“No,” he said finally. “You people mean the square thing, I reckon. It's more than I deserve, an' more than I ever expected to get. But you are both friends of Jim Lane. That man sent my old dad to the penitentiary. I can't be friends with friends of his, and I don't ever expect to be askin' him favors. You spoke of our comin' back to the River an' bein' good citizens. Livin' out this a-way ain't so pleasant, I'll grant you, but what chance would Ol' Man Meighan's boys have of bein' good citizens I'd like to know? Who'd believe them if they said they wanted to be? We'd have just about as much chance as a snowball in hell.

“No, I reckon things will have to ride along as they are. But you people have offered to do the square thing an' I'm not forgettin' yore comin' up here to do it.”

All Meighan's braggadocio had left him. Gil and Helen realized that he was in earnest—that it was only hatred for Lane and loyalty to his own blood which kept the man from accepting their proposal.

"Perhaps Mr. Lane was hasty in sending your father to prison," said the girl. "Everyone makes mistakes, you know, Mr. Meighan. But if Jim Lane is willing to do what he can to right the wrong, isn't it the manly thing for you to let him do it? You are not asking favors of him, in that case. You are granting him a favor, in giving him a chance to make up for the mistake; just as we wish you to be given the chance to make up for yours. By doing this thing you are putting yourself under no obligations to anyone, and you are benefitting everyone concerned. Don't you agree with me?" she asked.

"No," he said slowly. "I've got to think this thing over. I've got to talk with the others about it. I don't know what they will have to say. One way or the other, I'm standin' by them. I'll tell you what I'll do," he said to Hammond. "I'll meet you down at the mouth of Lightnin' Creek this evenin'. I'll think this over and see what Bill has to say about it. I don't think that he'll fall for it, but I'll put it up to him. If you an' Lane want to come up, you'll find me down at the creek about six-thirty.

"You folks had better be gettin' outa here. Bill's liable to be comin' back pretty soon an' he might start somethin'. Would you mind givin' me a shot of that tobacco before you leave?" he asked.

Gil handed Meighan his tobacco can. "Keep it," he said. "I have plenty more down at the station. You can give me another can sometime. I'll be at the mouth of Lightning Creek this evening, Meighan, and we'll keep quiet about what we know. Take your time and think

it over before you tell your brother. If the affair can be settled peaceably I'm sure that it will be best for everybody."

"I'll see what I can do," returned Meighan shortly.

Hammond accompanied Helen around the cliffs to the point where she had left her pony. Then he returned for his own mount and met the girl at the south end of the lake. Gil kept a sharp lookout for Bill Meighan, but saw nothing of the man.

Would Lane fall in with their plan of reconciliation, he wondered. The ranger undoubtedly believed that he had been justified in sending Old Man Meighan to prison, but perhaps he had been a little hasty in doing so. Yes, he felt sure that Lane would stand by the proposition which they had made to Cliff. The ranger was fair-minded and generous—not the type of man to hold a grudge. Gil was confident that Helen would have no difficulty in making her brother-in-law see the thing their way.

It was almost noon when Hammond and the girl reached the station. Lane was standing in the door as they rode up.

"You tell him about it, Helen," Gil said. "I'll take the horses." The girl dismounted at the door of the office and Hammond took the ponies to the barn.

"Don't laugh at me, Jim, please," Helen asked the ranger, after they were seated in the office. "I know you will feel like it, of course, when you know where we have been."

Then she told him of her's and Gil's discovery of the preceding evening, and the results of

the conversation with Cliff Meighan. The ranger did not laugh.

"You'll help us settle the affair the way we promised, if it can be done, won't you, Jim?" she finished.

The ranger looked thoughtful. "Yes," he said at last. "I'll be more than glad to get the thing fixed up in a peaceable manner if it is possible, but I don't believe it is, Helen. You talked to Cliff. He's the best of the three. If he had a chance he might become a decent fellow.

"What you said about us all being more or less responsible for the Meighans is pretty deep stuff. I never thought of it in just that light before. Still, there may be something in it. We have accepted the Meighans at their own valuation of themselves, because they have always been contemptuous of everything in the way of law and order. Bill was a slacker during the war. He hid out in the hills. Cliff went, and was a good soldier, they say. But the Old Man denounces the Government and everything connected with it, at every opportunity. One can't very well accept people as good citizens when they openly show that they hold good citizenship in contempt, can one?"

"No—but isn't there some way of showing them their mistake? Surely, they must be reasoning creatures. If we appeal to them as such, in the right manner, and let them know that we are in earnest, don't you think they might come to see the thing in a different light? It is terrible, Jim—this feud and all the bitterness."

"I'll admit that it isn't exactly pleasant to

think about," he replied. "But I wasn't anxious to have Old Man Meighan sent to the penitentiary a few years ago, for stealing timber. There was no other way out of it. The ranger who was here before me left the river because of the Meighans. Frankly, they ran him out. I came here, Helen, with instructions to stop the timber thefts and other violations. Before the trouble came I had a talk with Old Man Meighan. Nothing high-handed—just told him what the regulations were, and gave him to understand that I would enforce them. He laughed at the Service, cursed the Government at Washington, and told me that he would run me from the river inside of six months. He started with fires. I could get no proof as to who was setting the blazes, but they were undoubtedly set. Then followed a regular campaign of petty annoyances. Telephone lines were tampered with, grazing laws were disregarded, hunting and trapping laws were violated—just one thing after another. The Meighans were making the whole country untenable.

"Then came the timber stealing and the Old Man was sent up. He swore vengeance on me. Last year Bill was convicted of moonshine distilling. Now they are both out again and mean to get even with me, and drive me out of the country.

"What you said about heredity and environment is all well enough. It applies to Cliff and, in a measure, to Bill, although he is naturally bad—all the way through. But the fact remains that they are all bad because they want to be. They pride themselves that they are desper-

adoes. I think that it has become a sort of mania with them. There isn't any remedy for it, that I can see. I'll go with Gil up there this evening, Helen, but frankly, I haven't much hope of results."

"Thank you, Jim," the girl said earnestly. "We shall have the satisfaction of knowing that we have tried. That is something, at least. And please be careful this evening, won't you, Jim?"

The ranger promised not to take any useless risks. As she returned to the bungalow Helen met Gil crossing the road to the station.

"What did Jim say?" he asked.

"It's all right with him," Helen replied. "He doesn't have much faith in the plan, but he will stand by what we have promised. Do you think that there is a chance to settle the affair, Gil?"

"Hard to say," he evaded. "If Cliff Meighan were the only one we had to consider, I'm sure it could be fixed. But Bill will be the big drawback, I'm afraid, and the Old Man's influence is a factor to be considered. I'm hoping for the best, of course, Helen."

"That's the most sensible way to look at it, I'm sure, Gil," she smiled as she ran into the house.

Hammond found the ranger standing by the office window, gazing thoughtfully across the valley.

"What do you think of it, Jim?" the young man asked.

"It's a mighty funny business," Lane replied. "Helen certainly is a nervy little cuss, starting up there alone the way she did. I want the

affair to be settled peaceably if possible, but I haven't any great confidence in a promise Bill Meighan might make, even if he should make one, which I doubt. We'll go up this evening and talk it over. That's the least we can do."

"I believe that Cliff would do the square thing if he were let alone," Gil told the ranger. "By the way, who was the fellow they called 'Buzz'?"

"That was Buzz Wilson, a garage man from Alta Vista. Your discovery cleared up the moonshining question all right. The Meighans are making the stuff and Wilson turns it over to Sam Wah at Sand Point. The old Chinaman evidently has a way of disposing of it there, or of smuggling it through to some other town.

"There is a chance, of course, that the Meighans will realize that we are onto their little game and come to terms, but it's a pretty slim one. To tell the truth, Gil, I don't believe that the Old Man and Bill are entirely sane. This lawlessness has become a mania with them. They are fanatical in their bitterness and insane with moonshine whiskey most of the time. No normal, straight-thinking man would have such an attitude, it seems to me. That, of course, makes them all the more difficult to deal with. You can't persuade an insane man, all you can do is to lock him up."

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A few minutes after Hammond and the girl left the Meighans' hiding place in the cliffs, Bill Meighan returned. He had gone down to a friendly ranch house to telephone Wilson in

regard to their venture of the night before. He found his brother removing the still and gasoline heater which they had set up in the opening in the rocks.

"What th' hell are you doin' there?" he demanded of Cliff.

"We gotta get outa here. They're onto this place," his brother told him shortly.

"Onto it? How did they get onto it, I'd like to know?" Bill asked with an oath.

"Saw us loading the boat last night. This bird, Hammond, an' the girl down at the ranger station were here this morning. Offered to call it quits if we would ditch the still an' lay offa the ranger."

"The hell you say! What did you tell 'em?"

"Told 'em I'd put it up to you. This game's up, so far as I can see. There's nothin' else to do. They offered to have the charges against us stopped an' let by-gones be by-gones, if we agreed to lay offa the rough stuff. The girl appeared to be pretty anxious an' that bird, Hammond, acted like he meant to be on the level. They're meetin' us more than half-way."

"An' you let yourself fall for that old stuff—an' the goo-goo eyes?" Bill demanded with a sneer. "I've got a picture of their meetin' us half-way. An' I've got another picture of their dictatin' to us what we are to do. This still is a pretty soft graft, if you should ask me, an' I'm not quittin' it on anybody's say-so. Besides, we're out to get that bunch down there, an' get 'em for keeps. I come near gettin' Lane that night, an' I ain't missin' any more chances at him. Are they comin' up here again?"

"Yes, I told 'em I'd give 'em an answer to-night."

"When they get here we'll show up missin'. We'll move this outfit into that cave down at the mouth of Rock Creek, an' lay low for a few days. Then we'll make that bunch down there so busy they won't have time to be huntin' for stills—or anything else." He indicated the forest-clad mountains with a sweeping gesture.

"But where's all this gettin' us, Bill?" his brother asked. "We can't hide out up here all our lives. We've been gettin' by with a lotta stuff in this here valley. I'm thinkin' we're just about to the end of our rope."

"We're not goin' to hide out here all our lives," snarled the elder Meighan. Not by a damned sight! We're goin' to get about half a dozen of them birds down there an' then beat it. What's a eatin' on you, anyhow? Gettin' yeller? Don't forget that that damned ranger sent the Old Man to the pen, an' don't forget that he's booked to get his. We've been gettin' by with a lotta stuff an' we're goin' to get by with a lot more. If you feel a yeller streak developin', you'd better trot along an' give yourself up. I'm stickin'."

"I ain't gettin' any yeller streak, an' you know it," was the reply. "But we've been offered the chance of a square deal—more than we deserve—an' there ain't any reason, except your pig-headedness, why we shouldn't take it. As for the Old Man, he got what he had comin' to him, an' you know that too. I ain't fallin' for no Sunday School stuff, but I'm gettin' mighty tired of this; an' I ain't ashamed to say so. Another thing—I ain't lookin' for no

first-degree murder charges. When it comes to that you can deal me out."

"Are you quittin' or stickin'?" demanded Bill.

"I'm stickin', but you know how I feel about it," returned his brother. "Let's get this stuff down there in the bushes an' cache it till to-night," he added sullenly. "This place ain't goin' to be any too healthy for us by this time tomorrow."

"It shore ain't goin' to be healthy for anybody that comes sneakin' around," returned Bill significantly.

XVII

When the three emerged from the timber around the mouth of Lightning Creek that evening, they found Cliff Meighan seated on a boulder, calmly smoking. Helen had insisted on accompanying the men, despite Lane's protests. The girl felt that her presence might serve to avert anything in the way of trouble, should any such emergency arise.

"Good evening, Meighan," Lane said pleasantly.

"'Evenin'," the other returned gruffly.

"Well, what luck?" Gil asked.

"Nothin' doin'. I told Bill what you folks had offered an' he didn't fall for it. I'm stickin' by him I reckon."

The man's reply was short and conclusive. Gil was at a loss for words. He turned to the ranger. Helen spoke.

"Where is your brother?" she asked.

"I reckon I ain't sayin' just where he is, Miss," he replied slowly. "It wouldn't do you no good to talk to him. Bill ain't doin' any talkin'. I've been thinkin' the matter over since this mornin' an' I can see that you folks mean the square thing by us. I put it up to Bill just as you did to me. He couldn't see it. He's got it in for you," he told Lane, "an' I reckon he thinks that he has reason to have. I ain't sayin' as to that. One thing I will say though—because you folks have come up here the way you did. That is: Watch your step. I think you get me," he added significantly.

"But isn't there any chance for a settlement? Surely something can be done," the girl urged.

"There ain't no way, I reckon. The best thing you can do right now is to be gettin' back to the station. An' remember I told you to watch your step. I'm stickin' by Bill, just like I said; but if he would have been willin' to meet you half-way I wouldn't have held back none. Another thing—if things start a poppin' up here, I ain't takin' no hand till the showdown; then I'm stickin' by Bill."

The ranger had dismounted. He walked over to Meighan and held out his hand. "I appreciate your attitude in this thing, Meighan," he said. "There isn't any reason why you and I should hold a grudge, that I can see. Let's shake hands."

Meighan met the ranger's level gaze with a look of equal steadiness.

"I ain't doin' no hand-shakin', Lane. Not today. You sent my Old Man to the pen an' he's got it in for you. I'm standin' with my own family. But you're on the level, an' I'll not forget it. Remember what I told you."

He picked up the Winchester that had been leaning against a rock and started up the creek.

"We'll watch our step, Meighan," Lane called after him. "Good luck!" Meighan did not reply.

"This thing beats me," Lane said, as the three picked their way through the trees back to the main road. "Bill Meighan must be insane. What do you suppose he aims to do? He can't defy the law all his life, that's certain. We'll have to do as Cliff said—watch our

step, I suppose. There doesn't appear to be anything else to do."

"Are you going to report to Davis what we have found out?" Gil asked.

"No—yes; I'll have to, I suppose. We can't let this moonshine stilling go on up here. If Joe presses them pretty closely there is the chance that the Meighans will get tired of it and leave the country. I don't think that Davis has one chance in a hundred of catching them if they are careful. A dozen men could hide out, up here around the lake, with a reasonable degree of safety. Of course, the Meighans will leave their present location, if they haven't already done so. I'll tell Davis as much as I think best. It isn't necessary for him to know the details, anyway."

Helen was considerably upset over the failure of their plans.

"Maybe the thing will drop of it's own accord," Gil tried to console her. "Cliff Meighan isn't going to start any more trouble, if he can help it, and he'll do all he can to keep Bill straight. We've accomplished that much, anyway."

"I'm sorry we didn't get to talk to Bill," Helen said. "There might have been a chance of winning him over. Do you think that you could do anything with his father?" she asked the ranger.

"Not much chance," he told her. "Mabel begged me into going with Davis up to the house a few days ago, and trying to settle the thing, but the Old Man wouldn't listen to anything we had to say. We'll have to let matters ride as they are, I suppose."

As Gil and Helen sat on the steps of the bungalow in the moonlight that evening, the young man found himself marveling at the smallness, the sweetness and the wonder of her. Lane had said that she was a "gritty little cuss"—she was everything; everything that he had dreamed a woman could be. Gil had difficulty in controlling the impulse to take her in his arms and tell her that she was the sweetest, most beautiful, most wonderful little woman in the world. He was beyond the stage of choosing appropriate adjectives. All the beautiful language in the world couldn't describe her, Gil felt.

Helen, too, was conscious of several things besides the moonlight and the gentle, prolonged rustle of the pines on the hillside. Nor would she have been especially critical of language—or method—had the young man voiced his thoughts. Helen had been sure of herself for days, but she wanted Gil to be sure. Whatever he had been worrying about—the thing which he had not yet told her—kept Gil silent now. Perhaps he felt that he had no right to tell her of his love until he had made known that other thing. Although she felt a very strong inclination for being loved just then, and knew that the right word or look would satisfy that desire, Helen withheld the word—and the look.

She broke the silence with a whimsical suggestion.

"Let's have Mabel tell our fortunes," she proposed, springing up and rumpling Gil's hair playfully. As he caught her hand the girl pulled him to his feet. He stood for a few tense moments on the step below, covering her soft

warm hands with both his own. Helen's eyes were on a level with his. For a few moments she met his gaze; in the moonlight Gil did not see the warm flush which covered her features. But Helen was still mistress of the situation.

"Shall we go in, Gil?" she asked with a bewitching, taunting, little drawl, "or had you rather stay out here in the moonlight and hold my hand? I'll let you—sometime—if you're nice," she added impishly. Before he could reply, almost with the impulse, she bent and kissed him lightly on the lips, snatched away her hand and sprang up the steps.

"Please forgive me, Gil, and I'll never do it again—honest!" she mocked him from the doorway. "Do come in, Silly. I'm—I'm afraid the night air is bad for you!"

Hammond was bewildered—and some other things—for the moment. But he had just enough intelligence left to realize that the girl's action had been one of playful daring, and that she wished to avoid any serious conversation—at least, for the present.

"The night air is very bad for me," he said at last. "It's—maddening. Come back, Helen. Let's talk about it."

"Oh, I don't want to talk—not tonight, Gil. I want to dance, and giggle, and—but that's the night air, too," she ended primly.

Dancing back to the steps, she caught him by the arm and led him into the living room, where the ranger and his wife sat reading.

"Here, Mabel," she laughed, "is a nice, morose young man who is afflicted with just a touch of night air. He wants you to tell his fortune. Make it one of the long happy-ever-after ones,

please—with the villain and the red-headed girl. I'll get the tea things."

Helen returned in a few moments with the tea tray and, after Gil had finished drinking his tea, Mrs. Lane took the cup. Hammond, remembering their former conversation about spiritualism, did not know whether to accept the thing seriously or not.

"I'm not certain that I can tell you anything," Mrs. Lane said. "Sometimes I do get things right; sometimes I can't see anything at all. This appears to be clear," she continued, studying the cup.

"I seem to be able to see a person—a woman, a friend or relative of yours. She is rather tall—dark hair and eyes. Her mouth is small. She wears her hair low over the forehead and has several small pins, connected with a gold chain, on her blouse. She wears a diamond, platinum-set engagement ring and a gold ring."

"Does she wear any other rings?" he asked.

Mrs. Lane continued. "Her hands are long and slim—the fingers curve backward. She has a very curious ring on her right fourth finger. It has an engraved onyx shield.

"Do I describe anyone you know?" she asked Gil.

Hammond had been listening to the details with considerable interest. Most of them, of course, could apply to any number of persons. When she had mentioned a tall, dark-haired and dark-eyed woman, he had thought instinctively of his sister, who answered that description. The other details, too, had been accurate, though not important. When Mrs. Lane mentioned the hands and the ring he was astonished. His

sister's hands were long and slender; the fingers curved backward. And he had given her the very ring described, himself. It bore her sorority coat of arms on the shield.

"The person you describe is my sister, Mrs. Lane, and I don't remember ever so much as mentioning that I had a sister. How did you do it? Your description was accurate in every detail." His astonishment and curiosity was very evident.

"Frankly, I haven't the slightest idea how I do it," Mrs. Lane replied. "Sometimes I am able to tell things like that; sometimes I am not. Of course there must be a psychical or psychological explanation. Jim thinks that it is telepathy. Were you thinking about your sister before I described her?"

"No—not before you began. That is, not consciously. I thought of her as soon as you mentioned a tall, dark-haired woman, who was a friend or relative. Whatever it is, it certainly is a strange gift, although many people claim to possess it. Are you also clairvoyant, Mrs. Lane—a medium?" he asked.

"Not that I know of," she laughed. "I never have been in a trance in my life, that I can remember; and even the ouija board fails to respond to my touch. I just read teacups—and not very often, at that. I'm not very anxious to have people talking about my peculiarity, as you can imagine," she told him with a smile.

"Can you tell me something else?" he asked. "I'll not think of anything in particular, and we'll try to eliminate the telepathy hypothesis."

Gil tried to render his mind a blank as nearly as possible. Mrs. Lane studied the cup for a

few moments. "I don't seem to be able to find anything," she said at last. "Of course, I could draw on my imagination and tell you any number of things, if I were merely trying to tell a fortune. Suppose you think of something or of some person and we'll see if I am able to tell you anything."

He concentrated his thoughts, and after a few minutes Mrs. Lane spoke.

"I see something now," she said. "It is an old man. He is dressed in a gray suit—he wears a cap. His beard and hair are gray. He appears to be agitated about something. He is hurrying up the street—he wears heavy-rimmed glasses with a black ribbon attached."

"I don't seem to be able to find anything more," she told him finally.

"You certainly have found enough, as it is," Gil replied. "The old gentleman you saw was Dr. England, Geology Professor at the University of California. He was the man I had been thinking about. The telepathic hypothesis must be the correct one, all right. You certainly have an unusual gift, Mrs. Lane," he said admiringly.

"It sure is a great help in a whist or five-hundred game," the ranger grinned. "Mabel makes an excellent partner. She and I have the championship of the River; and people wonder how we do it."

"Sometimes the thing is a deuced inconvenience, though," he went on. "You can probably understand now just why I am hen-pecked, Gil," he added with a wink. "Even my thoughts are not my own."

The conversation drifted from telepathy to

clairvoyance and other allied subjects. Gil tried repeatedly to catch Helen's eye; but the girl refused to meet his gaze, except with quick, mischievous, mocking glances. She knew that he was thinking about the kiss, and the girl did not care to give him any advantage because of her whimsical impulsive action. No need for him to suspect more than was good for him, she told herself.

When Gil arose to bid them good night, Helen accompanied him to the door. "How is your attack of night air, Gil?" she queried mischievously.

"Excellent, thanks. How's yours?"

Helen blushed again. "Oh, I hope to survive it," she told him as she bade him good night.

When Hammond undressed and crawled between the sheets of his bunk, he found sleep an impossibility. He could not banish the teeming thoughts which crowded into his consciousness. What a complexity this thing, life, had become. How different from the even-flowing trend of three months ago! There were the Meighans—his California trouble—Mrs. Lane—Dorothy Paige—Powell—Helen.

Was the girl flirting with him? he wondered, as he thought of the kiss on the steps. What about the owner of the sweater? Heretofore, Helen had been as frankly straight-forward as a boy in her relations with him. Why this sudden change? Any one of a dozen other girls whom he had known in the past might have done the same thing that she had done, and Gil would have thought little of it. But coquetry in Helen—the best little pal in the world—he did not understand.

Gil was not very good at feminine analysis. Could it be that she had read his thoughts, and was sorry for him, he asked himself? The idea made him feel strangely embarrassed. He didn't want any kisses of sisterly sympathy. If he couldn't have real ones, he didn't want any.

Well, he was making a blooming idiot out of himself. No wonder Helen felt sorry for him. But he wouldn't have her laughing at him. No girl could do that—not even Helen. He would have the thing out with her tomorrow, one way or the other.

He rolled over, and kicking the covers to the floor, determined to go to sleep. But the imaginary sheep which he tried to count jumping over a fence were all black sheep. They kicked up their heels and frisked their tails and gamboled away, across the meadow. And, with a mocking, teasing smile, Helen, the shepherdess, clad in hiking costume, sat on the fence, swinging one stockingless, oxford-clad foot and watched them gambol. . . .

XVIII

But during the next few days Helen gave him no opportunity to "have the thing out with her." She did not avoid Gil, to be sure; but she did avoid anything which might lead to serious conversation; and in a manner which left the young man still further bewildered than he had been the night of the fortune-telling. The girl frolicked with Jim-Jams, as usual. Once or twice she even teased Gil about the night air," and alluded to his "Princess"; but Helen tactfully kept the conversation within the limits of playful banter.

Lane informed Davis of their discovery of the Meighans, and the deputy, with another officer, searched the cliffs for them; but without avail. He found the camp which the ranger had told him about, entirely deserted. No signs of the Meighans were to be found about the lake.

"Dog-gone their slippery hides," Davis grumbled, on his way back to the station. "Might as well be huntin' for a couple o' wood-ticks in a quarter-section. The only way to get at 'em is to take a posse and comb them rocks with a fine-toothed comb."

"There's a chance that they may get tired of the game, and leave the country," Lane suggested.

"Not them. All they'll do is to skip over to Crystal Lake, in Quartz County. There'll be a couple o' revenue fellers up here in a day or so. We'll go up there an' just naturally turn over

every darn rock in the vicinity," Davis promised, as he rode away.

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One afternoon Mrs. Christy telephoned Helen, asking her to bring the Lanes and Hammond over to spend the evening.

"Three of our California friends arrived this morning," she explained. "They are motor-ing through to Glacier Park, and are planning to spend several days on the River. I am anxious for you to meet them." She did not think it necessary to explain that Hammond already knew her visitors.

If Gil had any apprehensions in regard to the identity of the "California friends" when Helen told him of the invitation, he did not show it. The visitors were, in all probability, persons he had never heard of before, he told himself. If they were his former friends, Mrs. Christy would have mentioned the fact, he reasoned. He had no legitimate excuse for refusing the invitation; and besides, Gil had come to look at the California incident more or less calmly. He had done nothing to be ashamed of. All this bitterness and dread was childish. He would go to the Christys' and meet their visitors like a man.

As a matter of fact, Mrs. Christy herself did not know all the details of the California incident. She knew the reason for Hammond's leaving; but the fact that Powell was in any way implicated was unknown to her. That, of course, had been confined strictly to his own fraternity circle. Neither was she aware of the

break with Dorothy Paige. For all Mrs. Christy knew, Hammond's presence would be a pleasant surprise for Miss Paige. She told her visitors that some friends from the ranger station were coming down to spend the evening, and let it go at that.

Neither Mrs. Christy nor her husband dreamed that Hammond's meeting with her visitors might produce an awkward situation. On the other hand, Mrs. Christy was hoping that the conversation of the evening might answer any number of questions, about which her husband had insisted that she curb her curiosity.

Elizabeth having once more regained the powers of locomotion, the four of them drove over to the Christys', leaving Jim-Jams in the care of little Ruth Knutson, who frequently came to the station to look after the youngster when Mrs. Lane was away.

Mrs. Christy met them at the door. "Some old friends of yours are here tonight," she told Gil. "You will be glad to see them again."

Hammond felt a sickening sensation of dread, in spite of his good resolutions. A moment later, when they had entered, and Mrs. Christy was presenting Dorothy Paige, Lester Powell's sister, Evelyn, and Powell himself to the Lanes and Helen, his face became pale and set. The others, too, were not a little surprised at seeing Hammond; but Dorothy Paige was too well-bred, too much mistress of herself, to show emotion.

"How do you do, Gil?" she said cordially, as they shook hands. "This certainly is a surprise. We didn't expect to meet you up here.

I think this place ought to be re-named 'The River of Surprises.' "

"Oh, Hammond is one of our most prominent citizens," Christy told her.

Evelyn Powell, a jolly fluffy-haired young miss of seventeen, showed genuine pleasure at the sight of Gil.

"Why, hello, Gil Hammond!" she exclaimed. "And to think that Mrs. Christy didn't even tell us that you were here! Who said that this trip was going to be uneventful?" she asked the others.

Powell's face had become chalky at the sight of Hammond. With an effort he pulled himself together. When Gil had finished greeting the others, Powell held out his hand.

"Hello, Gil, old man," he said. Powell's voice was husky. His outstretched hand trembled visibly; and there was a look of eagerness, almost of pleading, in his eyes. For a moment Gil made no movement to take his former roommate's hand; then he caught Helen's look of entreaty over Powell's shoulder. Realizing that this was no place for a scene, he shook hands.

"How are you, Powell?" he asked coldly.

Instinctively, Helen knew that something was wrong. She had seen Gil become pale, and Powell's nervousness was evident. Even the Lanes recognized that something was amiss. Mrs. Christy, who had witnessed Gil's hesitancy in shaking hands with Powell, and had noted the strained expressions on the faces of the two young men, was horrified. She could think of nothing to say.

Helen broke the awkward silence. "Did you

visit Pendleton for the Fourth-of-July roundup, Miss Paige?" she asked Dorothy.

"Yes, we spent three days there. Evelyn fell in love with all the cowboys, of course. We almost had to kidnap her to get her away," Dorothy replied.

"I didn't do any such thing!" denied Miss Powell. "But some of them *were*—gorgeous!" she admitted. "Lester wanted to ride in the bucking contests, but we wouldn't let him. He would have broken an arm, or a neck, or something—and neither Dot or I are good nurses, or drivers. We needed him, you see."

"So you limited the breakages to cowboy hearts. That was most diplomatic, Miss Powell," Lane offered. In the sharp battle of repartee which followed the ranger's shot, some of the tenseness of the situation disappeared. Mrs. Christy was quick to take advantage of the lull, and dispose of her guests at whist. She seated Powell and Helen opposite the ranger and Miss Paige. Gil and Evelyn were matched with Christy and Mrs. Lane. Mrs. Christy excused herself to prepare refreshments.

When Mrs. Christy was ready with the cooling drinks, Helen ran to the kitchen to help her serve them. The girl fearing more awkward moments, had been searching for a way to prevent them. She had hit upon a plan.

"Do you mind if I brew some tea, Mrs. Christy?" she asked. "Mabel tells perfectly wonderful fortunes from teacups. I'm sure she will be glad to do it, if we ask her."

Mrs. Christy was more than glad to seize upon any plan which might prevent her party from ending in disaster.

"What could have been the matter with those two young men, Helen?" she queried. "They acted—so strangely—I thought they weren't going to shake hands at all."

"They were both surprised at seeing each other," the girl evaded. "Possibly that was the reason."

Helen had a rather definite idea as to what was the matter with them, but she did not care to discuss it.

"They certainly acted strangely," Mrs. Christy repeated.

The girl made known her plan to the others, as she helped Mrs. Christy serve the cold drinks. "We have something in store for you—another surprise from 'The River of Surprises,'" she smiled at Miss Paige. "My sister is going to read your destinies in a teacup. If any of you have dreadful secrets on your conscience—such as broken-hearted cowboys—you had better beware of the sorceress."

Powell looked uncomfortable—or rather, more uncomfortable. He had been ill-at-ease all the evening. Gil, on the other hand, had regained his composure, and was trying to make himself agreeable, Helen was glad to note. The cards had been abandoned, and he was talking easily to Evelyn Powell. The ranger was teasing Christy about some old photographs, in an album; Mrs. Lane and Dorothy were laughing at Lane's witticisms. Powell was the only one in the party who appeared ill-at-ease.

Helen, resolving to play Good Samaritan, after she had finished serving, took a vacant chair at the table where he sat alone, nervously fingering the cards. Christy, too, had noticed

Powell's agitation; and even Gil, who had been watching him all the evening, felt a contemptuous pity for the fellow. Helen chatted pleasantly as they drank their lemonade, and Powell seemed eager to talk. But he was fidgety—nervous. He spilled lemonade on his vest, and appeared to be considerably embarrassed thereby.

Finally Helen arose, and going to the kitchen, returned with the teapot and cups. "Who wants a glimpse into life's hidden mysteries?" she challenged. "Don't you want to volunteer, Miss Powell? Shall it be 'Ladies First'?"

" 'Gentlemen,' by all means!" insisted Evelyn. "Gil here, or Lester would make good victims. Step forward, gentlemen! If you survive, Dorothy and I shall follow suit."

"Mrs. Lane has already told my fortune," Hammond replied. "It wasn't so gruesome, I assure you. Come on—be a sport! She really tells things," he urged.

"All the more reason for me to keep out of it," laughed Evelyn. "My past and present are blameless; but my future—who can tell?"

She caught her brother by the arm and led him to the table where Mrs. Lane was seated. "Come on, Les. If I can't be a sport, you at least can be a hero—and save the family honor. After you, I come next, my dear brother."

Powell, smiling nervously, tried to draw back, but Evelyn held him in the chair. Very obviously, he did not want to have his fortune told, either.

"What am I supposed to do?" he asked, seeing that resistance was useless, "make a wish?"

“Yes, Silly. Drink this cup of tea and make a dozen of them, if you like. Make one or two for me,” commanded Evelyn.

Mrs. Lane sat watching them with a smile. The older woman could not help noticing the striking contrast in the three girls—Evelyn, light-hearted, yellow-haired, fresh as a morning glory; Dorothy, beautiful with a conscious perfection of poise and manner; and Helen—Mrs. Lane studied her sister and realized that Helen possessed the desirable traits of the other two, with an added something. She was a joyous girl; yet a woman. In her quiet dignity there was a warm human touch of sympathy and understanding which Dorothy did not possess. In her lighter moments the girl was as carefree and unspoiled as Evelyn.

Powell finished drinking his tea and handed the cup to Mrs. Lane.

“If there is anything that you don’t care to have told, better not think about it, Mr. Powell. Mabel sees more in her victims’ faces than she does in the teacup, I sometimes believe,” the ranger warned him good humoredly.

Although he did not know it, Lane’s advice had just the opposite effect that the ranger had intended that it should have. Powell, who was already in a state of nervous excitement, found the very thing that he did not care to remember crowding all other thoughts from his mind. The young man’s face paled again, as it had when Gil had appeared in the door. He shifted anxiously in his seat, and glanced uncertainly at Hammond.

Gil sat watching the performance with considerable interest. What Mrs. Lane had told

him personally had given him faith in her strange power. He believed that it was telepathy. Was it possible that she could read Powell's thoughts, and tell something about the California episode? Gil realized that Powell's nervousness indicated that his state of mind would be favorable to such a disclosure. Gil was not a little excited at the prospect.

Helen noted his look of intense expectancy, and divined something of the cause. She had rapidly come to the conclusion, from his avoidance of all conversation with Powell, and his cold politeness to Dorothy Paige, that these two had in some way been connected with Gil's unpleasant experiences which had caused him to leave California. Powell's actions made her all the more certain of it. He was now leaning forward, elbow on the table, with his hand shadowing his face so that the others could not see his expression; but Helen had seen him grow pale at the ranger's good-natured warning. The girl tried to think of something to save the situation, but was at a loss for anything to do.

Mrs. Lane studied the teacup for a few moments.

"You weren't quite fair to me, Helen," she said. "I haven't had a chance to get my imagination into working order, Mr. Powell. I probably won't be able to tell you anything at all."

"Les won't mind that a bit, Mrs. Lane," laughed Evelyn. "He's already scared pink that Dot here will find out something about his past love affairs. My dear brother doesn't believe in letting his right hand know what his left has done, I'm sorry to say. Do conjure up

just a little teeny flirtation or two, won't you, please?" she begged.

"I think that I see something here," Mrs. Lane told them, as she studied the cup. Everyone became attentive; Evelyn smiling, eager; Gil and Helen tensely expectant; the others good naturedly amused. Powell's face was still shaded; but his fingers twitched nervously.

"There is a room here," Mrs. Lane continued. "It appears to be dark. The moonlight is coming through the window. There is someone in the room—I believe it is Mr. Powell—yes, it is he. He appears to be rather nervous and excited about something. He is crossing the room to—"

She paused for a moment, as though astonished at what she had seen. "Why—that certainly is strange!" she exclaimed.

Evelyn was leaning forward, tense with excitement. She clapped her hands eagerly.

"Oh, that's just great!" she exclaimed. "Do go on, Mrs. Lane! He crosses the room—in the moonlight—to a girl on a sofa, of course! Do—do go on with it!"

Powell stumbled to his feet, his features haggared, terror-stricken.

"Stop! For God's sake—that's enough!" he almost shrieked. With both hands to his forehead, he staggered through the doorway into the hall, and up the stairs.

Everyone—except Gil and Mrs. Lane—was speechless with amazement. Lane and Christy hurried up the stairs after Powell. Mrs. Christy, Dorothy and Evelyn stood in the doorway, gazing up the stairs—too horrified for words. Mrs. Lane had merely arisen from her

seat at the table. Of them all, only she and Hammond appeared to be calm. Helen, who had remained with Gil, where he stood, was astonished at his unusual expression. He appeared to be entirely unmoved, not even surprised. He was smiling a curious, almost contemptuous smile.

"I wonder what Mrs. Lane saw," he remarked quietly.

Helen buried her face in her hands. "Oh Gil, it's terrible!" she whispered.

Mrs. Lane tried to reassure the three in the doorway.

"It's just a bad case of overwrought nerves, I hope," she told them. "Surely he will be all right in a few minutes—here's Jim now."

"He's pretty badly upset, but ought to be all right in a little while," the ranger said. He whispered to Gil a moment later. "Better take the folks home. I'll stay here with Christy, and call you, if necessary. Powell's gone clean out of his head. He's babbling like a lunatic. Better 'phone Doc Miller, from the station, and tell him to come up as soon as possible. No need to 'phone from here. They'll worry enough, as it is." He nodded toward the three in the doorway.

When they arrived at the ranger station Gil telephoned Dr. Miller immediately, then he took the car to the shed which served as a garage. Mrs. Lane and Helen were waiting for him on the front steps of the bungalow, when he returned.

"Jim said that he would come home as soon as Mr. Powell became better," Mrs. Lane said. "Poor fellow, he certainly looked ghastly. He

had been very pale all the evening, anyway."

"Something like nervous breakdown, I imagine," Gil said noncommittally.

They sat on the steps and waited for Lane's return, or for a telephone message. No one thought of sleep. That, of course, was impossible to any of them. With tacit consent, the three avoided the thing which had caused Powell to leave the room. Whatever ideas Mrs. Lane had in regard to her cup-reading and its bearing upon Powell's action, she thought best to keep to herself. She was glad that neither Gil nor Helen had questioned her. It was all very strange—weirdly grotesque. Mrs. Lane wanted to think the thing over.

Gil, of course, believed that he understood the reason for his roommate's action; but he realized that any explanation which he could give might appear far-fetched, even ridiculous, from the average person's point of view. Besides, Powell's present condition forbade any discussion of the thing. Gil no longer hated Powell; in the place of hate, a feeling of contemptuous pity for the fellow's weakness had arisen.

Finally they heard Lane crossing the meadow. The ranger was whistling plaintively to himself. He, too, had been given considerable material for meditation.

"Powell was asleep when I left," he said as he threw himself down on the lower step, with a huge sigh of relief. "He certainly was crazy for a while. I thought he was going insane. Can't be very far from it, even when he's normal, from the way he acted tonight."

"He was always pretty nervous," Gil agreed.

“Well, I imagine you folks won’t have any objection to a little sleep, seeing that it’s already one-thirty. Think I’ll turn in myself.”

He bade them good night, and went to his room in the ranger station. Flathead Joe, who had been left to attend the telephone while they were away, lay on a cot in the office; his gurgling rhythmical snores bespoke peaceful oblivion. Hammond gave the sleeping Indian a peculiar mirthless smile, as he passed through the office and closed the door.

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“Mabel,” Lane asked his wife, after they had gone to their room, “what did you see in that teacup that made Powell go off his nut the way he did? What the deuce was he doing across the room you spoke about?”

“I didn’t see anything in the cup at all, Jim,” she replied.

XIX

Next morning Lane called up to inquire about Powell.

"He appears to be all right this morning," Christy told the ranger. "He's white as a sheet though—looks like a spectre. Says that he's going to get up in a few minutes.—Is Hammond at the station? . . . Good! Tell him to stick around for a few minutes. I'm coming up to see him."

When Christy drove up a few minutes later he found Gil alone in the office. "Look here, Hammond," the engineer began gruffly, "I'm not much of a hand at butting in on another man's business, but that fellow did some mighty funny talking, when he was out of his head, last night. I've thought all along that you got a damned rotten deal out of that California affair, and now I feel sure that Powell had something to do with it. Just what part did he play in the affair?"

"I'd rather not talk about it, Christy, until Powell is able to speak for himself," the young man replied. "No matter what I may believe about it, at present, I can't prove anything. What did Powell say?"

"Oh, he raved about not doing something—cursed that professor, Martin. Tried to tell us that he couldn't help doing whatever he had done. He called your name several times—seemed to be begging for forgiveness, and all that. It wasn't especially pleasant to listen to.

Lane heard it.—Do you think that Powell stole the money?"

"He told the Academic Senate and our fraternity that I had done it," Gil replied. Christy knew nothing of the fraternity affairs, of course.

"How do you know?"

"Dr. England told me. He said that it was Powell's testimony, in both cases, which caused them to take action."

"Did you return the money, Hammond?"

"No!"—Gil was surprised. "I didn't know that the money had been returned."

"It was the night after you left, I believe. Powell told me. He must have done it himself—the damned sneak! Haven't you kept in touch with anybody at the University?"

"No; even my sister doesn't know where I am. I have written to no one."

"Then, you didn't know that the University had suspended action—that you hadn't been expelled?"

"No!"

"They did. There must have been some doubt in their minds as to your guilt, even though the returning of the money made it look bad for you. Powell told me that, too. From the way he spoke, I had no idea that there was anything wrong between you."

"Powell knew that there was something wrong all right," Gil replied, as he thought of the morning he had left his fraternity house.

"This is what I have planned to do," Christy explained. "As soon as he gets on his feet again—Doc Miller told him to stick around and take it easy for a few days, or he'd have brain

fever—I want you and Lane to come over to the house. We'll put the things he said last night up to him, and ask for an explanation. He'll give it—he'll be afraid not to.

“By the way, I wonder what Mrs. Lane saw in that cup. He must have thought that she saw something, anyway. We might work that up and use it as a bluff. Do you believe she actually saw anything?”

“I don't know. If she says she did, I'll believe her. She told me some mighty curious things, the other night.”

“Did she know anything about the money trouble?”

“Yes, she must have known something. I told Lane the gist of the affair. But I didn't give many details. If she didn't know them, she certainly made it realistic. I believe in telepathy, of course. She might have tapped Powell's mental processes.”

“It certainly was strange. Find out just what she saw, if you can. We might have a chance to use it. What do you think of the whole plan?”

“I don't know. If Powell did the things we think he did, he's pretty sneaking. But he's mighty weak, too. The suggestion stuff might work,” Gil said thoughtfully.

“This is a mighty decent thing for you to offer, Christy,” he continued, “especially when Powell is your guest. I want you to know that I appreciate it, and that I appreciate your confidence.” He held out his hand.

“He won't be my guest—for long—if I find out what I expect to,” the engineer replied as they shook hands. You don't look or act like

a man who would steal two hundred dollars, Hammond.”

After the engineer had gone Gil stood by the window, looking out across the valley. He was thinking of Powell and Dorothy Paige. The night before the girl had worn an engagement ring, and a fraternity pin similar to the one she had returned to him, the morning he left the University. So they were engaged, he thought, recalling what Evelyn Powell had said about her brother's love affairs. Those two engaged! He thought of Powell's conduct of the preceding night, and of its effect on Dorothy—and the mirthless, cynical, contemptuous smile curled his lips.

“Oh Gil, don't look that way. It's—terrible!”

Helen stood in the doorway.

“Why—terrible?” he asked.

“It's not like you, Gil. It's—unworthy of you.”

“I know that I must seem a cold-blooded inhuman cuss, Helen,” he replied. “But maybe I have reason to be.”

“I know, Gil—I know several things—that you don't think I know.”

He gazed at the floor for a moment or two.

“What do you know, Helen?—do you know that I have been accused of being a thief?”

“Yes, Gil. I've known it for weeks. I didn't believe it.”

He was astonished.

“Beth Linderman wrote me about it,” she explained. “I remembered seeing your picture in the California annual which she sent me. Beth and I used to be chums in Helena. I—I

sent for my copy of the Annual, and found out all—all about you; and when I wrote Beth that you were up here on the River, she wrote me—why you had left California before commencement.

“I—I showed Mabel the letter—it had all the details—about how the money had been gone when you came back from San Francisco, and—and everything. Mabel said for me not to allow the letter to—to make any difference. I wouldn’t have, anyway.

“She didn’t read anything in the cup, last night. She just saw how you both acted—and surmised things. I—I wasn’t being disloyal, Gil. It was curiosity. I was sure that you were what you seemed to be—all the time.”

“Isn’t there something else that you know, too, Helen?” he asked slowly.

“Maybe—I think I do—but you might tell me and see,” again the old mischievous twinkle.

“There’s something else that I want to tell you first,” he said huskily. “That is that I think that you are the straightest—the most wonderful girl in the world. What manhood there is in me, Helen, you have awakened and strengthened by being—just your wonderful self—”

He paused for a moment. The girl was playing with the tassel of her crocheted sweater.

“I’m not going to apologize for loving you—you know that I do, of course,” he continued slowly. “That’s something that was—it just had to happen. But if there is someone else, I want you to know—anyway—that I shall think of you as—just what a girl should be.”

Helen raised her eyes to his. “What makes

you think that there might be someone else, Gil?"

"You said—your Prince of the Sweater, Helen."

"He wasn't a prince—only a very good friend. There wasn't any prince—until—" She was gazing past him, through the window.

"Until when, Helen?"

The mischievous twinkle came into her eyes once more.

"You aren't very good at love-making, Gil; are you?" she asked with tantalizing composure. He imprisoned both her hands.

"Until—when, Helen?"

Again she raised her mischief-brimming eyes to his.

"Until *you* came, silly. Do I have to kiss you again, Gil?"

Hammond took the initiative with remarkable promptness. The girl's arms slipped around his neck. He held her hungrily for a few moments; then she drew away a bit, with a happy little sigh, their hands still resting on each other's shoulders. Each read in the other's eyes magical unspoken messages.

"Your—practical demonstrations—have redeeming features," she drawled, with the impish twinkle. Gil resumed the practical demonstrations.

Presently, with a little laugh, Helen slipped from his embrace.

"Tell me something, Gil," she questioned. "I'm not going to be jealous, if I can help it, but—was Dorothy Paige the Princess who was not a princess? Beth didn't tell me that."

"You were the real Princess, Helen," he said

earnestly. "No other girl could ever have been that. When the thing your friend wrote about happened, Dorothy returned my fraternity pin, without even seeing me. She's wearing Powell's pin now."

Both were silent for a moment. "You said—that I had been a help to you, up here on the River, Gil. How did I do that?" the girl murmured.

"You had faith in me, Helen—you and the Lanes. You gave me back my confidence—in life and in myself. When I wanted to tell Lane, before you came, he said that it didn't matter—wouldn't listen to me. And you made me realize that it didn't matter, Helen. Not enough to allow the thing to spoil my life—even if I had done it. It looked pretty black—for a while, little girl—until you came."

After a moment he continued. "You mentioned the way I looked a while ago. I was thinking of Powell and Dorothy. He was my friend, my roommate; and it was his testimony that condemned me. I had been betting, of course, but that could have been explained, if I had waited. You said my feeling the way I do was unworthy of me and I reckon it is—anyhow, it's unworthy of you, sweetheart. I don't hate him any longer—I'm not looking for a chance to get even. That will take care of itself—it is already doing so. But it isn't easy to forget a friend who has betrayed one, Helen—even though he is as weak as Powell."

He paused again, and continued. "I am still branded as a thief in my fraternity and among my old friends. Powell did that. I—I can't

ask you to marry me, Helen—not until this thing is settled.”

The girl looked at him tenderly for a moment, then the twinkle came back into her eyes. “I’m afraid you’ll have to, anyway, Gil,” she murmured.

“What?”

“I—I helped you make love,” she told him with a blush, “—but when it comes to proposing—I absolutely draw the line!” she ended primly. The girl slipped into his arms and once more buried her face on his shoulder.

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After Helen had finally slipped away to the bungalow, Hammond sat for a long time and tried to realize that it had not been a dream—a wandering flight of his fancy. He had visualized it all before, but had hardly dared to consider the possibility of its ever coming true. What a pleasant thing life was—what a good old world it was—

Suddenly the telephone jangled, loud and shrill. Mechanically, he took down the receiver and answered.

“Beaver River Station; Hammond speaking!”

“Hello! That you, Hammond?” came the inquiry, in excited tones.

“Yes—?”

“Hello! This is Butler—up on the Flatiron. Cliff Meighan’s here! He’s got me held up!”

“What?”

“Cliff Meighan’s here—sez he wants me to give you a message.”

“What is it?”

“He sez to tell you that there’s goin’ to be hell a poppin’ before mornin’. He sez—wait a minute! He sez to tell you that Bill Meighan’s goin’ to set the whole damn woods on fire, before mornin’! He sez—!”

“The deuce you say!” snapped Hammond. “Let me talk to Meighan!”

“He sez nothin’ doin’. He’s got me covered. He sez to tell you that Bill’s soused to the gills, an’ is goin’ to set the woods on fire, around the upper end of Beaver Lake, an’ on the west side of the Flatiron. Sez that Bill wants to burn that oil rig they’ve got down there, too. Sez to tell you that you’d better get every man in the valley, an’ have ’em ready to fight fire!”

“Ask him where Bill is.”

“He sez to hell with you an’ Bill both! He don’t know where he is. He sez that Bill lit out this mornin’, drunker’n a lord, an’ swearin’ that he was goin’ to set the whole damn woods on fire. He sez that you can take it or leave it, an’ be damned; but you’d better get them men—sez tell you that he’ll stop Bill himself, if he can find him—sez that you don’t have to believe that neither, unless you want to—sez that if you don’t you can go plumb to hell! What?—Yes—to—hell!—hell!”

Butler paused for a moment, evidently waiting for instructions from Meighan.

“He sez that there ain’t no need of your comin’ up here; he’s goin’ to let me loose as soon as I get through ’phonin’. Sez that I can call you up after he leaves. He sez—”

Gil could not repress a smile at Butler's agitated "he sez!"

"Tell Meighan that I'll take his word for it," he interrupted. "What? . . . Tell him that I'm not coming up—and tell him that I'm going to get the fire-fighters. . . . Yes! That's easier than going to hell! What? . . . 'He sez you've gotta hang up?' All right—go to it, son!"

Hammond pondered for a moment. Should he inform Davis and attempt to apprehend Bill Meighan, or should he attempt to gather a crew of fire-fighters? Gil decided to do both. Lane had gone out an hour or so before, with Flat-head Joe, and might not be back till noon. Gil realized that Cliff Meighan would not have telephoned, had he not thought the danger serious. His doing so was a pretty square thing, as it was. Gil called several of the ranchers who had been employed by Lane during former emergencies, and asked them to be ready to respond, in case of need. Then he telephoned Joe Davis. Mrs. Davis answered the 'phone.

"Joe went down to Noxon this morning, with two revenue officers," she told Gil. "He won't be back till noon. They raided the Meighans last night, and found their still fixin's up Rock Creek. Both the Meighan boys got away. I'll tell Joe as soon as he gets back."

Gil was forced to admit to himself the gravity of the situation. Bill Meighan, free in the hills and crazed with drink, might set any number of fires; and the woods were as dry as an old barn. With the crew which he had at his disposal—the men working at the oil well could also be conscripted, in an emergency—a number of simultaneous fires would mean disaster. From

what Cliff had said, Bill was intending to fire the magnificent stand of yellow pine north of Beaver Lake—the best timber in the whole reserve—and the side of the Flatiron, with some insane idea of destroying the derrick which stood near the edge of the woods. The derrick could be saved, Gil reasoned, by back-fires, if necessary. There was just a chance that Meighan was sober enough to wait till dark to begin setting the blazes. The thing to do was to take him, if possible, before the fires were started.

Gil called to Helen, who was out in front of the bungalow, playing ball with Jim-Jams.

“Helen, I want you to stay in the office until Jim returns, and answer any fire calls that may come in from Squaw Peak or the Flatiron,” he told her quietly. “If a call should come before Jim gets back, call up Adams and tell him to get that crew I ’phoned him about up here on the double. Tell Jim that Cliff Meighan has just called up from the Flatiron, and says that Bill Meighan is crazy drunk, and swearing that he’s going to set the woods afire—north of the Lake, and on this side of the Flatiron. Tell Jim that I’ve already called up Adams and those haying crews of his. He’ll know what to do.”

“Where are you going, Gil?” the girl asked anxiously.

“I’m going to see if I can’t stop Meighan, before he gets any damage done,” he replied. “Don’t worry about me, little girl. I’ll be careful, and not take any chances. Someone has to go, you know.”

“Must you go?” she pleaded. He held her

for a moment and then pushed her away gently.

"Has to be done, sweetheart. Davis has gone to Noxon, and there isn't anyone else to go. Don't worry. You know that I won't take chances—now!"

He hurried to the stable and saddled his pony. As he came from the barn he saw Lane and the Indian crossing the meadow toward the station. When they came up Gil told the ranger of Cliff Meighan's message, and what he himself was planning to do.

"Davis found their still last night, and destroyed it," he explained. "He went to Noxon this morning. Bill is crazy-drunk. He's probably been that way for a week. You know what that means. The only thing to do is to stop him before he gets the fires set."

Lane was thoughtful for a moment. "Wait a minute," he said. "Joe here, and I will go with you. Helen knows what to do, in case of a fire call; and we'll be able to see the smoke ourselves, from up there. As you say, there is just a chance that he will wait till night to set the fires. We've got to get him before he does."

Hurrying to the bungalow, he told his wife where they were going, and then helped Flat-head Joe saddle the ponies. After Lane had given another low-voiced assurance to his wife, the three rode up the river, leaving the woman and the girl, anxious-faced, watching from the gate.

"You brought a gun, of course?" the ranger asked.

"Yes."

"Good. Joe and I have ours. I'm hoping

that we won't have to use them. Have you any idea where we are likely to find Meighan?"

Flathead Joe spoke for the first time. "Me find 'um," he grunted confidently.

As the three turned into the woods at the north end of the lake, to leave their horses, they found Cliff Meighan standing by the side of a tree, leaning on his rifle.

XX

"I figgered that some o' you birds would be along pretty soon," Cliff said without greeting. "If you're lookin' for Bill, I reckon I'll go along."

"What's the matter with Bill, anyway?" the ranger asked. "Is he crazy?"

"You've said it. It ain't the pen he's headed for—it's Warm Springs. He's been hittin' the booze steady, for the past week, an' it's got him to seein' snakes. He's loco. This mornin' I tried to get him to beat it outa here, while the beatin' was good—an' he took a shot at me. I'm through," he added laconically.

"Would you have any idea where he is?" Lane questioned. "It certainly won't do to leave him out here, in that condition."

"No. I left him on Rock Creek this mornin'. Davis raided the still last night, while we were asleep up in the cliffs. When Bill found it out, this mornin', he went loco. I tried to get him to beat it outa here, an' he cussed me an' took a shot at me. Swore that he was goin' to set the woods on fire, an' when you birds come up here to put it out, that you'd get yours. I had Butler call up, meanin' to hit it out alone; but I got thinkin', an' decided that it wouldn't do to leave Bill the way he is. I've been down around the mouth of Rock Creek, an' through the woods up here; but haven't seen nothin' of him."

"We might split up and comb the woods

for him," Gil suggested. "We could meet up at the other end of the lake, two hours from now, and if anyone of us should be lucky enough to run across him, without having a chance to take him back without a fight, the four of us could go back together and overpower him. We'll have to slip up on him, of course. We don't want any gun play."

Flathead Joe shook his head with a grunt. "No good," he said. "You had booze cached?" he questioned Cliff.

"Yes, we had a can of it hid up there in the woods, below the lake," Cliff admitted.

"Him there," the Indian asserted confidently.

"There's somethin' in that, I reckon," Cliff agreed. "Bill will be lookin' for booze. Davis busted up all we had around the still."

"It's a good idea, Joe," the ranger assented. Without a word of reply, the Indian started through the woods around the eastern border of the lake, keeping well back from the road, in the trees. The others followed.

At the north end of the lake they crossed the Alta Vista road, and keeping out of sight from the cliffs, followed the logging trail which led across Rock Creek to the base of the crags. Presently Cliff Meighan stopped.

"Bill will be comin' down here, I reckon, if he's lookin' for booze," he said in a low voice.

They examined the whiskey cache, and found that the can of liquor had not been disturbed. Bill Meighan might still have a supply on his person. The ranger placed the others so they could spring out and overpower Bill, in case he should come for more. The four, crouching

behind bushes and stumps, and eagerly scanning the cliffs for a sight of him, waited for the drunken man to appear.

Suddenly the Indian arose and appeared to be listening intently. Presently the others caught a faint rattling sound which seemed to originate from nowhere in particular. Lane thought that it might be coming from the Alta Vista road and turned to gaze down the logging trail. But the Indian knew better.

"Echoes!" he grunted. "Him horse and buggy."

The sound came nearer, becoming more distinct. Presently the watchers, peering intently through the trees, made out a horse and buggy, with a solitary driver, moving slowly up another logging trail which branched off from the Rock Creek trail near the end of the line of cliffs, and joined the Alta Vista road a mile or so below the trail they had followed around the edge of the lake.

"It's that damned Chink," Cliff Meighan told them in a low voice. "He's up here to see Bill—has been here three or four times in the last two weeks. We'd better stop him. If he meets Bill, there's liable to be somethin' doin'!"

As they hurried toward the Chinaman, Sam Wah tied his horse to a bush and shuffling down to the edge of the lake, began to study the cliffs. Failing to locate any sign of Bill, he sat down and prepared to wait.

"Maybe Bill will see the Chinaman and come down, if he's around here," Lane whispered to Hammond. "That will give us a chance at Meighan."

They crept as close to the old man as the

bushes would permit, and waited. Sam Wah continued to sit on the rock, seemingly half asleep, stoically waiting. The three white men stirred impatiently. Only the Indian seemed to be unmoved, calmly unaware of the tenseness of the situation. Gil and the ranger continuously eyed the cliffs, and the woods south of the lake, for a sight of Bill Meighan, or for signs of the threatened fires. Cliff fidgeted restlessly.

Had the Indian's judgment been at fault after all, Gil wondered? Would it not have been better for them to have separated and searched the woods for the man? Sam Wah sat hunched up on the rock, asleep, like a toad in the sun. The waiting became unbearable. Even the Indian began to show signs of restlessness.

Suddenly a rock tumbled down one of the shale slides and splashed into the lake. The four watchers lay motionless, alert. The Chinaman awoke with a start, and sat up, rubbing his eyes. Bill Meighan appeared in the opening between the cliffs, at the head of the shale slide, and picked his way unsteadily to the bottom. As he approached the Chinaman, the watchers could see that the elder Meighan's features were drawn and contorted.

"What the hell are you a doin' here?" he demanded of the Chinaman. Sam Wah continued to sit on the rock, calm, undisturbed.

"You owe me one hundled sixteen dolla, for still," he answered in soft, unemotional tones. "You pay now—alle same as you say?" he asked.

Meighan did not reply. He glared at the old

man. Bill was working himself into a state of frenzy.

“Why you no pay?” the Chinaman queried again. “You no got the huddled sixteen dolla?”

For answer Meighan seized Sam by the collar and shook him as a pup would a rag doll. A quick glint of steel flashed in the sunlight. The Chinaman, held at arms' length, stabbed rapidly—three times. As the four in the bushes rushed forward Bill Meighan staggered back, and jerking a revolver from his pocket, fired once at the crouching figure with the menacing knife. The Chinaman sank to his knees, and lay huddled on the sand, like a half-empty laundry bag. The revolver dropped from Bill Meighan's hand. He reeled for a moment, and before the others could come up, fell backward, across the rock where the old Chinaman had sat asleep, a few moments before.

Cliff Meighan lifted his brother and tore open his shirt.

“He's not dead yet,” he cried. “For God's sake give me a handkerchief or somethin'! Let's get him down to the house!”

Lane tore off his own cotton undershirt and applied it to stop the flow of blood from the wounds in Meighan's chest. Then they lifted the wounded man into the buggy.

Gil turned to the Chinaman who lay as he had fallen, huddled in the sand. The man was quite dead. Even in death his features were mummy-like—expressionless as a mask. Gil took a gunny sack from the buggy and spread it over the dead man's face. It was all he could do. The body would have to remain where it

was, until the coroner came. How lonely the huddled figure was, there in the sunshine. The young man realized that now, in all probability, its story would never be known.

Lane stopped the buggy at the whiskey cache and the Indian brought the can; but the liquor did not revive the wounded man. His breath was failing rapidly.

"I'll get one of the ponies and telephone from the Moores' for a doctor," Gil told the ranger. Lane nodded and the young man hurried away. As he reached the main road he glanced back and saw the ranger driving slowly up the logging trail, Cliff seated beside him, supporting the helpless form of his brother; and the Indian, still unmoved, walking by the side of the buggy.

Below the lake Gil met Joe Davis galloping hurriedly up the road. "They told me at the station that you folks had come up here," Davis explained. "Did you find Meighan?"

As quickly as possible, Gil related what had happened.

"I'm going to telephone for Dr. Miller. They're coming back there," he added as he galloped away. When he had finished telephoning he rode back to meet the others. Davis and the Indian were riding behind, the latter leading Lane's pony.

Before they reached the Meighan place the ranger gave the others a significant glance. They knew that Bill Meighan was dead.

As Old Man Meighan met them carrying the body of his son into the house, he stared wildly into the face of the dead man and then gave Cliff a ghastly questioning look.

"The Chink did it; he's dead," Cliff Meighan explained in graphic monosyllables.

They laid the body on a bed, to which an old woman, sobbing pitifully, led them. The father stood for a moment, gazing dumbly at his dead son's face, still haggared and distorted by passion and hatred; then he sank down by the bed and buried his face in the covers. As Gil turned away, unable to gaze longer at the pitiable spectacle, he realized that as Bill, who lay there, a victim of himself and of a false conception of human relations, had paid, so Old Man Meighan, in hardly less measure was having to pay.

The four slipped out quietly, leaving the stricken parents with the body of their son. Cliff was tying the pony which the Chinaman had driven, to the fence.

"This is Buzz Wilson's hoss," he said dully. "Buzz has left the country." No one replied. They could think of nothing to say.

"I reckon you'll be wantin' me to go along with you," Meighan said to Davis, after a pause. Cliff's face showed no resentment. He too was dazed—horror-stricken.

Davis turned and looked toward the house. The mother's sobbing could be heard through the open doorway.

"I—I guess they'll be needin' you more than I do, Cliff," the deputy replied huskily.

The four rode away, leaving Cliff Meighan still fumbling mechanically with the halter rope.

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The passing of Bill Meighan proved to be the

end of the fire-setting and moonshining regime on Beaver River. Despite the tragedy of it, everyone realized that some such termination had been inevitable. As Lane had said, Bill's bitterness and contempt toward everything that stood for law or restraint had become a mania with him. He looked upon everyone as an enemy—good citizenship was to him a thing to be scorned. He was anti-social, a menace to the community; and he was past the stage of reasoning for himself, or of being reasoned with—a human mad-dog. For such a person there is but one end.

Old Man Meighan was now cowed and broken; for the piteous old mother there was no room for any feeling except sympathy. Many remarked that he had brought the thing on himself, by a life of lawlessness; but none could fail to understand the measure of his paying.

Not the least tragical figure in the whole sad affair, Gil realized, was the old Chinaman, who lay where he had died at the hand of Bill Meighan, up by the lake—unmourned, and in a few days to be forgotten.

Cliff Meighan had gone to work in the hay fields. He was still suspicious, at times sullen; but the people of the River believed that he had learned his lesson. With the big-hearted sympathy characteristic of Beaver River—and of other Rivers—they were for giving Cliff his chance.

“Jim has always held that there is some good in Cliff,” Gil told Helen, a few days after the incident up at the lake. “He certainly is a fighter; and he's going to have to fight. His

warning us the way he did was a mighty square thing. Maybe, after all, Cliff will find a way to fit himself into this strange mosaic we call Life."

"It's a curious mosaic," the girl replied thoughtfully. "I think that it is more like a chess game—because the pieces themselves are always shifting. One never knows what sort of nitch one may be called on to fit into next. Don't you think that is one of the things which make life so fascinating?"

"Yes," he told her, with a whimsical grin. "I know one small bit—of rosewood and pearl—that isn't going to do a lot of shifting, if I can help it."

"You *do* say nice things—at times—Gil," she told him dreamily. When Helen looked like that, Gil always resorted to "practical demonstrations."

XXI

The series of incidents which had terminated in the death of Bill Meighan and the Chinaman had, in a measure, served to divert Hammond's thoughts from Powell and his strange behavior that night at the Christys'. Now that life on the River was once more beginning to assume its normal routine, Gil found himself wondering just what the outcome would be.

That morning Dorothy Paige and Evelyn Powell had driven up to the ranger station. Both Dorothy and Evelyn realized that there must be some misunderstanding between Powell and Hammond. Evelyn quite naturally attributed it to her brother's and Dorothy's engagement. Miss Paige herself had other ideas in regard to the reason for Powell's and Gil's estrangement. She had observed both young men rather closely that first night, at Christys', and a subsequent study of her fiance had not proved reassuring. Miss Paige said nothing, but did considerable thinking.

But Evelyn knew of no reason why she should keep silent.

"Les mopes around like a lost soul," she told Helen. "He's the most love-lorn person imaginable—only it isn't exactly 'love-lorn'—it's tragical. I think that he's afraid that Dot here is going to jilt him, or something. He hasn't any spirit at all, any more."

Hammond, who had heard Evelyn's remark, wondered whether or not Christy had said any-

thing to Powell in regard to the engineer's suspicions. Gil felt that the thing was bound to come to a show-down before Powell left the River. Still, he was not entirely prepared for the turn of events which took place the day after Dorothy's and Evelyn's visit.

The engineer came into the office next morning, while Gil and Lane were plotting from field notes an old section line which they had resurveyed the day before. Christy's face and manner showed that he was considerably excited.

"Powell tried to commit suicide this morning," he told the two at the desk, without preamble. Lane and Gil looked at the engineer in amazement.

"He didn't get away with it," Christy continued. "I tricked him; and now I think we have him where we want him, Hammond.

"I've been doing a little detective work on this thing," he explained. "The night that Powell went off his nut the way he did I remembered having seen a bottle marked 'poison' in his traveling bag. I was suspicious. After Powell had gone to sleep and you, Lane, had returned to the ranger station, I showed the stuff to Doc Miller. He said that it was cyanide of potassium, in solution. He said that collectors sometimes used the stuff to kill moths and butterflies, but that it was dangerous to have around. Told me that in his present condition, Powell was liable to do most anything.

"We emptied the bottle and I asked Miller to refill it with something that would put Powell to sleep, in case he did try any stunts. Miller

did so, and we put the bottle back in Powell's traveling bag.

"Next day I questioned Powell, in a way that he wouldn't suspect anything, and found that he didn't know a Polyphemus from a grasshopper. He hadn't been doing any collecting.

"I didn't tell you about it, when we had that talk the other morning," he said to Gil, "because I hadn't much faith in the thing. It seemed too much like Sherlock Holmes stuff actually to work—besides, I didn't know that Powell was going to try to commit suicide. He did this morning.

"He acted mighty queer at breakfast, so I hung around the house for a while, in case he should try to start something. After breakfast he went back to his room. I meant to go up to see if anything was wrong, but Evelyn beat me to it. She came screaming down the stairs, that her brother was dead—had killed himself!

"She was holding this letter, to me." He handed Gil a note, scrawled in Powell's handwriting, and signed.

"I ran upstairs," the engineer went on, "and found that instead of killing himself, as Powell had intended, he had merely put himself to sleep. I managed to quiet Evelyn a little, by showing her that Powell was not dead, and telling her that the bottle had contained only a narcotic; but she had read the letter, and was pretty badly cut up.

"When I came back downstairs, Dorothy Paige was reading the letter. She was cool as an icicle. She beats me. The girl is engaged to Powell, but for all the surprise she showed,

she might have been reading that the weather would be warmer tomorrow. She just handed me the letter, and stood there, with her damned perfect composure, without saying a word.

"Powell's asleep," the engineer finished.

"He's booked to stay so for several hours. What do you want to do about it, Hammond?"

Gil read the note. It was wandering, feverishly written—a complete confession to the theft of the baseball funds.

"I had meant to return the money," Powell had written. "I did, after Hammond had gone. I took it to pay a bet to a fellow on the *Call*. I was going to pay it back as soon as Dad sent me my check. I didn't dare ask him for it; I had already had several scraps with him, over betting. I got the money from the safe while the others were waiting for me to bring around the car. No one asked me if I had gone back to the *Pelican* office. If they had, I might have had nerve enough to confess.

"But Martin got the idea that Gil had taken the money, and when he looked at me with those damned snake's eyes of his, I found myself telling just what he wanted me to. I was already scared stiff. When he got hold of me, he had me hypnotized.

"I'm not trying to justify myself. I know that I was a coward—that I still am. That's why I'm killing myself. I've meant to, ever since the first, if the thing was ever found out. All the time I wanted to tell Gil that I had taken the money, but I just couldn't do it. When they got him in there before the Academic Senate Committee, I didn't believe that they could prove anything—and I knew that I had

taken the money. That made me wild. I just wasn't man enough to speak. When I found out what the fraternity had done to Hammond—God! I must have been insane when I said what I did in there! And when he threatened to kill me the way he did, I was afraid that he would. Now I wish to God he had.

"After Gil left the campus I was just too weak-livered, too yellow, too much of a damned coward to speak up. Anything as low as I am hasn't any right to live. I don't want to live. But, for God's sake, when you settle this thing, Christy, keep it from the folks. Dot will have to know. I owe that to Hammond. But don't let *them* know that I was a thief—tell them that I went insane and committed suicide.

"This letter will make things right for Hammond. I can at least do that—even if I am not fit to live—"

Gil handed the letter to Lane. The ranger already understood enough of the affair to appreciate its significance to Hammond. Oddly enough, at that moment Gil was not thinking of himself, and the fact that his honesty had been vindicated; he was thinking of Powell. He did not answer Christy's question—"What are you going to do about it?"—immediately. For several minutes the three men were silent.

After all, had Powell wronged him as much as his former roommate had injured himself, Gil wondered? He could not drive the picture of the weak, cringing, pitiable fellow, who now lay in a drugged stupor, from his mind. Powell had caused Gil to come to Beaver River. His treachery had broken Hammond's faith in his fellows, in himself, and in all his old ideals.

But on the River Gil had found something bigger and better.

Mere faith, truth, justice, fraternity, love—those old abstractions upon which he had based his philosophy of life—were gone. In their place he had acquired a bigger conception. He no longer held to the old law of the Judges and the Prophets—an eye for an eye. The abstractions had become relative terms. To each and every man they applied in a different degree, according to the understanding which Nature had given that man. And every one, from the smallest to the greatest, was human—that meant mistakes. Gil had learned to study people. Helen had taught him to look beneath the surface of things.

Had he continued to live his old life, along the old blue-printed course which he had outlined for himself, Hammond realized that he would still be judging people by the old abstractions—those fixed stars, in the firmament of his code of acceptance.

The wrong which Powell did him had sent Gil to Beaver River. And the River had given him a newer and better philosophy of life, a renewed confidence in himself and the world—for now he realized that whatever life might bring him, he could accept it and face it with confidence—and the River had given him Helen.

For Gil the future was something to look forward to—it promised him happiness; but what of Powell? What would life hold for *him*, when he awoke from his drugged sleep—which he had intended to be an eternal sleep? Powell must face all the bitterness which he, Hammond, had experienced those first few days, in California

and on his journey north, plus the added realization that he had committed the theft, betrayed a friend and brother, had lived a lie; and being too weak and contemptible to continue to live and face the consequences like a man, had tried to end his own life.

Hammond no longer hated him, he no longer felt a contempt for him. In the place of these had come a genuine pity and a sympathetic understanding of the fellow's miserable plight.

The engineer repeated his question. "What are you going to do about it, Hammond? That letter will put you right with the University and with your fraternity. It will show Powell up to the world for what he is."

"Let me keep the letter, Christy," Gil said quietly. "I want to talk to Powell—as soon as he wakes. I think that this thing can be settled now, in a manner fair to both of us, without any trouble. Powell has tried to commit suicide; he might do so again. I want to talk to him as soon as possible."

The engineer looked a question at Hammond. Lane's face was a curious study of conflicting emotions.

"Do you mean to say, Hammond," demanded Christy, "that you're going to let that damned sneak get away with what he has done, and not make him pay for it?"

"Hasn't he paid for it, Christy? Isn't he paying for it every minute? And won't he keep on paying all the rest of his life? His letter and actions show that he is, and will."

Hammond's attitude was too much for Christy. "Well, I'll be damned!" he ejaculated, with mingled disgust and amazement.

When the engineer and Gil reached Powell's room they found him still asleep. After some difficulty they succeeded in waking him. Powell sat up and gazed at them in dazed uncomprehension. Then, as his mind cleared, he became wild-eyed, white-faced.

"It's all right, Les. Take it easy," Hammond said quietly. "You didn't drink poison—it was only a sleeping draught. We're going to straighten this thing out without any trouble."

Powell looked blankly at him for a moment, then he hid his face in his hands and sobbed like a child.

"All right," he said at last, "I'm ready to take it—what is it you want me to do?"

"I want you to write a confidential letter to Dr. England," Gil said, "telling him just what you did in your note to Christy. Doc will fix it up for both of us. I'll write him myself, and ask him to tell the Fraternity and the Faculty that I have requested that they take no action in the matter. They owe me that much, at least.

"You are not going to let this thing spoil your future, Powell. I read your letter, and believe what you said. What you did proved more of a benefit to me, in the long run, than an injury. Some of the things which have happened to me up here on the River have more than made up for my having to leave the University. If I'm satisfied to let it drop, you ought to be willing to forget it also, Les."

"Why are you doing this thing for me, Gil?" Powell asked after a moment.

"There isn't anything else to do, that I can see."

Powell could not reply. He arose, and going to the window, gazed out up the valley. He was moved to the very depths of his being. There was nothing that he could say.

Leaving Powell to write his letter, Gil went downstairs. Trembling, with moist eyes, Evelyn Powell met him in the hall. He led the girl out on the porch.

"The thing is settled, Evelyn," he told her soothingly. "There isn't going to be any trouble. Les is going to write Doc England. He is a friend and fraternity brother to both of us. I'm sure that he can fix it up."

"Oh Gil," she sobbed, "how could Les do it?"

Her question was almost in identically the same words which Hammond's own sister had used. He could not help noticing it.

"Les meant to return the money," he told the girl. "He did not plan to do me an injury. Give him credit for that, Evelyn. You know how sensitive he is. What he needs now is sympathy and understanding. If he finds that the rest of us still have faith in him, he will regain his confidence in himself. I was pretty bitter at first, I'll admit; but I believe that what he said in his note to Christy is the truth. The whole thing was just too much for Les. Be as natural with him as you can, Evelyn. Remember that he's having an awful jolt."

"Oh, I know that he is weak," the girl sobbed. "He—he always has been, Gil—." She pressed both his hands. "You—you're an angel, Gil!"

Gil was not an angel, and knew it. The whole

thing was distasteful to him. But he was man enough to look at it squarely. He did not want Powell to have to endure more than he could bear. If Powell could live the thing down and make something of his life, in spite of it, Gil would be glad to see him do it.

Dorothy Paige had for several days been looking for an opportunity to speak to Hammond in private. The events of the morning had not greatly affected her. From Powell's actions the night of the party, and from his subsequent behavior, she had been quick to draw conclusions. Evelyn gave Miss Paige the opportunity which she sought by going to her room and leaving Gil on the porch. Dorothy knew just what she wished to say, and with her accustomed composure and dignity, softened by a touch of emotion—genuine, or otherwise—she said it.

“It isn't a pleasant thing for a woman to have to admit that she has made a very grave mistake, Gil,” she began, in a low voice. “It's none the more pleasant when she realizes that her mistake has wronged someone who was—a friend. I—I want to say that I am sorry—that I have been sorry ever since that first week—that I didn't have more faith in you.”

Hammond was ill at ease. He had long since learned to accept Dorothy at her true valuation. Of all those connected with the unfortunate affair, he had come to give her the least thought. Dorothy was eminently able to take care of herself—she would take care of herself. He would have been more content to let the matter drop without being mentioned.

“That's all done and over with, Dorothy,”

he replied. "I'm not blaming you for not seeing me. Under the circumstances, you believed that I was guilty. From your point of view, there was nothing else to do. Let's not talk about it. I'd much rather forget it."

But Dorothy had no intention of forgetting it. Hammond noticed that she no longer wore Powell's fraternity pin, and that his ring was not on her finger. His lack of interest changed to contempt. Was she going to treat Powell as she had done him?

"Lester and I were engaged," the girl went on in lowered tones. "But I broke the engagement last night—before I knew this thing, Gil. After I had seen you, I could not believe that you had done as they said. Bob Hadley's sister told me that something was wrong. She had heard Bob and the dean talking about it, and was asking me questions. When I asked Les, he admitted that the money had been taken. He was your roommate. Both he and Bob were your fraternity brothers. You know that I am—impetuous, Gil. I am sorry—very sorry for my—mistake. Can't we be—friends, once more?"

Hammond disregarded the question. "Aren't you making the same mistake again?" he asked evenly. "If you loved Powell enough to become engaged to him, surely you can see that he needs everything in the way of faith and sympathy that he can get. Don't be hasty in your treatment of Les. Whatever injury he did me was because of weakness, not because of any desire to wrong me. He needs your confidence, Dorothy. It will help him get back faith in himself."

“Just as I told Les and Evelyn, I’m not holding any grudge against Powell. As I look at it today—and I am as calm as I ever have been in my life—I have to admit to myself that the things which the River has given me more than balance what Powell did. Life has come to mean more, in every way. Powell sent me to the River. Why should I hold a grudge against him, after the way things have turned out? If I feel that way about it, surely you can, too.”

Miss Paige realized from Gil’s words that her efforts had been in vain. “Lester isn’t a man,” she said coldly. “He will always be a weakling. I don’t care to see him again—ever. I’m going home,” she added, “as soon as Mr. Christy can take me to Noxon.”

Gil knew that further attempts to convince Miss Paige would be wasted. “Although Powell hasn’t the strength of character that could be desired, at least now he’s trying to take his medicine like a man. I’m giving him credit for that,” he could not help saying.

Miss Paige did not reply. Instead she gave Gil a coldly pitying smile, and with head erect, and the ever conscious perfection of poise, she crossed the porch and entered the house; leaving Hammond still seated on the steps.

XXII

As Gil sat at the table in the office of the ranger station, making out checks for the latest crew of fire-fighters, Christy entered and tossed a large batch of mail on the table.

"I was down at Noxon this morning, and found these in the post office for you," he explained. "From the looks of that bunch, Powell's letter must have got results." Powell and his sister had left the River the day after Miss Paige's departure.

Gil picked up the sheaf of letters and sorted them over. One was from the Dean of Engineering, one from his sister; another was written in the handwriting of Dr. England. The other letters, over a dozen in number, were from various members of his fraternity. There was a large paper cylinder, bearing the stationery head of the University.

"You're an engineer, are you not, Hammond?" asked Christy.

"Just a minute," grinned Hammond, as he tore open the cylinder. "I have been such for three days, I believe," he replied, holding out the diploma. It stated that Gil had been awarded the degree of Bachelor of Engineering.

"Have you any definite plans for the future?" Christy inquired.

"No. I shall start looking for an opening, of course. I'll have to stay here till the end of the fire season."

"No need to start looking," replied Christy. "I'd like to make you an offer myself. When you get through with this forestry job, I'm pretty sure that I have something that will interest you. We'll talk it over one of these days," he finished, leaving Hammond with his mail.

First of all he tore open the letter from Dr. England.

"Gil, my son," the old man had written, "I knew that you were never guilty of the thing they charged you with. I told the Academic Senate, and the Fraternity that I knew it. And now you have been vindicated. No need to tell you that the Old Man is glad.

"I placed Lester Powell's letter in the hands of a representative committee of the Senate, as soon as I received it. They immediately took such action as your letter will tell you. Your record is as clean today as it was the day you entered the University. I am glad that, as you told me in your letter, you are not holding any enmity. Many of the Faculty believed, as I did, that you could not have done the thing. That is why they had agreed to let the matter drop, without any decisive action.

"As to the Fraternity, I called together all the available members around the University and in San Francisco. When I read them Powell's letter, needless to say, they were deeply moved. The Fraternity has written you, as an organization, and most of the members have written personally. Don't feel bitter toward the boys, Gil. Remember that they were young—hot-headed. As you said, they worshiped the name of the Old Fraternity.

Many of them are not old enough to have grasped the bigger meanings. But they are fine, big-hearted, impulsive fellows. And they are deeply grieved over their mistake. I am sure that you will see that the manly thing—the big thing, Gil—is not to hold bitterness.

“Your request in regard to Powell, I placed before both the Academic Senate and the Fraternity. The former has consented to take no action in the matter; and the Fraternity will not make the mistake it did before. Powell will be given his chance. Let me say that the boys appreciate your attitude in this thing. It has given them a new conception of the meaning of Fraternity. As you say, the episode has not happened in vain.

“I am glad that you have found happiness up there on your little river. The Old Man has always desired it for you, in the fullest measure. Write him, Gil, my son. Remember that he will always be

“Fraternally yours,
“Thomas England.”

“Good Old Doc—good Old Roman—the noblest Roman—the noblest Greek—of them all!” Gil murmured to himself, as he folded the old man’s letter.

He read the message from his sister, then the one from his fraternity, and afterwards each of the letters from the brothers themselves. After he had finished reading he stacked the letters together and mechanically tied them into a bundle with a piece of twine.

For a long time he sat deep in thought. Gil had learned to avoid a hasty impulsive deci-

sion. The words of the old doctor's letter came back to him. Yes, the boys were fine, big-hearted, impulsive fellows. They had not meant to do him a wrong. And they were still his brothers, had asked him not to repudiate that brotherhood because of their mistake. The Old Doc had begged him not to hold bitterness—to do the manly thing.

He went to the typewriter and composed an answer to Dr. England and to his fraternity. Then he opened his trunk which sat in front of the window and took out the tray. In the bottom, still neatly folded, lay his big sweater, with its block "C"—emblem of California and the Golden Bear. Beneath it lay his memory book, the cover gold-stamped with the University initial. Crammed into a corner of the trunk, in the little box which he had thrust into the pocket of his bathrobe, *that* morning at his fraternity house, was his pin, together with the seal ring which he had removed in the office of the real estate dealer, in San Francisco. Gil spread them out on the bed. They were his—with all their pleasant memories, happy associations. He would not allow a little stubborn bitterness to rob him of all those memories and associations. They were passed—could never be replaced. And they were his—now he had a right to them!

Gil opened the little box and took out his fraternity pin. It lay in his hand, pearl-encrusted and enameled, the emblem of his relation to—all his fellowmen! The word, "Fraternity"—what a metamorphosis its meaning had undergone! Four months ago he had considered it to be a tie which bound a few—chosen

for similarity of taste, good breeding, good fellowship. Now he realized that it was a tie which bound every man to his fellow. It was a race-tie—one which had existed since the beginning of human advancement. It was this same principle which had enabled savage Man to survive throughout the ages—had enabled him to conquer this still-cooling planet and make it his own. It was back of the co-operation which meant progress. Its attributes were faith, sympathy, understanding. Its application could not be limited to an individual group; it was a world-factor, vital in the progress of the race.

Gil picked up the little pin and fastened it to the pocket of his flannel shirt.

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“Mamma,” chirped Jim-Jams—it was Saturday; they were at the dinner table, “what makes Aunt Helen an’ Hammon’ look at each other all the time, an’ jus’ smile? Do they know somethin’ funny, Mamma? Do they?”

Gil and Helen joined in the laugh which followed.

“They know something very nice, I imagine, Son-boy,” replied Mrs. Lane. “Suppose you ask them about it,” she added with a sly glance at her husband.

“I was thinking,” Hammond told Helen, “that it has been quite a while since we visited the Submarine. Suppose we make a little social call on His Majesty this afternoon. I have a feeling that the old boy is going to unbend and be friendly for once.”

“ ‘To him who in the love of Nature holds —’ ” quoth Lane. “ ‘Holds’ is good. We’ll draw a curtain on the ‘holding,’ ” he grinned maliciously at Helen.

“Oh, Mamma! I’m goin’, too!” shouted Jim-Jams, banging his plate with his knife. “I can hold him! I falled right on top of one onct—didn’t I, Hammon’?”

“I should say you did! And you ‘falled’ into the creek, too, if I remember correctly. We’ll have to get you a rubber diving suit, Jim-Jams.”

“Mamma’s going to make cookies this afternoon. Don’t you want to stay with her? Gil will let you see the fish, when he returns, you know,” his mother suggested.

Jim-Jams became a rank deserter. “Will you give me some cookies, Mamma?” he shouted. “Will you give me a bucket full? I want to feed ’em to the rooster—an’ I want to eat some, too! Will you give me a bucket full, Mamma?”

“Oh, I’ll give you several,” Mrs. Lane temporized, with a smile.

“How many is ‘several,’ Mamma? I wanna bucket full. Will you give me a bucket full, Mamma? Will you?”

“Yes, yes, son,” replied Mrs. Lane, with mental reservations concerning the size of the bucket.

“What shall we use for bait?” Helen asked. “Flathead Joe said that they were biting grasshoppers, last week.”

“I have Jim’s latest Parisian models in flies, and also salmon eggs,” replied Hammond. “The Submarine would be insulted at the sight

of a mere grasshopper. He would consider the offer of such a bait nothing less than lese majesty."

"I had forgotten his aristocratic tendencies," the girl replied. "We'll give him the Parisian models, by all means."

As they crossed the meadow to the creek, Helen glanced at Gil's fraternity pin and gave him a little smile of understanding.

"Christy has given Cliff Meighan a job over at the oil well," he told her. "He says that Meighan is making good."

"I am glad of that," the girl replied softly.

"Yes; so am I. Christy told me this morning that he would have a place for me as soon as the fire season closes up here. I think that I shall take it. The pay will be good; and Christy is a fine man to work with. Then, there is a chance that one may strike something lucky, in the oil business."

"Jim has some shares in the well, has he not?"

"Yes, and I have a tiny block myself. Christy has a lot of faith in this project; but it's pretty much of a toss-up, just yet. I'm not worrying about the future, Helen. There is too much—too many other things, to leave room for worry. When you have finished your school, next June, little girl—"

The two followed the path leading down to the big pool, forgetful of everything except their own plans for the future. Truly, it held too much for both of them to leave room for worry.

Gil and Helen were not expecting too much of life. Both realized that neither was especi-

ally gifted—neither had any of the attributes of genius. They were just two, out of the thousands of wholesome, sane, straight-thinking young men and women of America. All they desired was to be able to fit themselves into their own particular nitch in life, to the best possible advantage to themselves, and everyone else. They were starting like thousands of other young couples. Their heritage was faith in themselves, in each other, and in the rest of mankind; a wealth of human sympathy, and the beginnings of a true conception of life.

Some few people are given genius—are potentially, great benefactors of the race. One may believe, as someone has said, that the Great Scorekeeper gives these a rating according to the degree in which they make use of their gifts. If their percentage in the score-column is high, many errors can be forgiven. Others, like Powell and Cliff Meighan, start life with a handicap. If, in spite of this, they learn to play their little part in the game, surely the Scorekeeper does not forget to take the handicap into account when he figures the final averages. There is another class; to this belong all the Gils and Helens. The members of this group start with the advantage of knowing how to play the game—with a philosophy of life. If they play their parts, now and then stopping to help the score of a less skilful player, by giving him the hand of brotherhood, of sympathetic understanding, of Fraternity—surely their worth is not forgotten in the final rating of the team.

As they approached the pool Gil stopped.

“We must be careful to keep out of sight,

and not let our shadows fall on the water," he told her. "I think we had better cross over and cast from behind that clump of bushes."

A big tree was lying across the creek, below the pool. As they started to walk across it, Hammond pointed to a long black object which, caught on a submerged snag, was waving back and forth in the current.

"What the deuce is that?" he asked.

Helen gave a little laugh. "It must be my stocking," she said. "I dropped it in the pool, *that* day, if you remember."

"Yes, I noticed," he grinned. "I'll get it for you."

Helen protested, but he loosened his line and cast out into the stream, in the hope of unhooking the truant stocking from the snag upon which it had caught and was undulating back and forth in the current.

"Couldn't think of leaving it there," he drawled. "Think of the influence it might have on the fish!—besides, it's bad luck to separate a pair of socks."

Suddenly, as he trailed the hook-tipped leader in the ripples, there came a tremendous splash and tug on the line; and as Gil's grasp tightened instinctively, in answer to the stubborn pull, the wrapped bamboo pole bent to the breaking point, the reel screaming a challenge, as the line played out.

"Sufferin' shades of Isaac Walton!" he yelled, clutching desperately at rod and reel. "We've hooked the Submarine!"

But the wager had already been paid.

THE END



